



November 2017

Advancing Online Education in Minnesota State

A strategy for online education

Full report



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Background

The 2017 “Advancing Online Education in Minnesota State” report was prepared by the Online Strategy workgroup, an ad hoc workgroup chartered by Minnesota State’s Leadership Council. The ad hoc workgroup convened from January 2017 through August 2017 and was comprised of appointees from each of Minnesota State’s collective bargaining unions.

This complete report includes a total of forty-two (42) action steps aligned with fifteen (15) distinct strategies that support four broad goals to (1) collaborate across institutions in ways that increase (2) access to and the (3) quality of online opportunities that remain (4) affordable for students compared to other higher education providers.

Minnesota State institutions have their own history of defining and organically growing “online education.” For meaningful progress to occur, the authors of the report have recommended prioritizing action steps that can make substantive improvements to the existing ways we operate, rather than attempting to “wipe the slate clean” and make large transformational changes on behalf of all Minnesota State institutions. Such transformational changes are hard to accomplish in the short-term and frequently run counter to the historical missions of public, non-profit entities like Minnesota State institutions. Such innovations are not discouraged within Minnesota State; instead, the workgroup believes individual institutions are best positioned to pilot such experiments as they can nimbly adapt to the changing needs of students.

Addressing all forty-two actions included in this report would be an unmanageable undertaking for Minnesota State and it’s institutions in the short-term. The authors of this report have used an asterisk (*) to identify the nine action steps the workgroup believes the campuses should consider over the 2017-2018 academic year, with an intention to begin implementing action steps during the 2018-2019 academic year.

Online Strategy Workgroup

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Vacant		MSCSA (1)
Vacant		MSCSA (2)
Ken Graetz	Winona State University	MSUAFF (1)
Michael Penrod	St. Cloud State University	MSUAFF (2)
Vacant		Students United (1)
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Defining Online Education

The term “online education” has been used as a blanket phrase for a number of fundamentally different educational models. Phrases like distance education, e-Learning, massively open online courses (MOOCs), hybrid/blended learning, immersive learning, personalized and/or adaptive learning, master courses, computer based instruction/tutorials, digital literacy and even competency based learning have all colored the definitions the public uses to define “online education.”

For the purpose of this report, strategies and action steps were developed in ways that define “online education” as having the following characteristics:

- Students who enroll in online courses or programs may reside near or far from the campus(es) providing the course(s) or program.
- A student’s course load may include offering where attendance is required in person or where an instructor/students are not required to be in the same geographic location.
- Students may enroll in one or more individual online course offerings provided by one or more institutions to that may or may not satisfy degree/program requirements.
- Student may pursue a certificate, program, or degree where a substantial number of courses, perhaps all, are taken without being in the same geographic location as others.

The authors of this report agree that institutions should continue to explore and pursue a variety of models for delivering education, but this report does not address or offer strategies for each of these. Each model of education engenders a specific method used to approach education and is accompanied by its’ own list of strengths, weaknesses and opportunities.

Organization of this Document

In fall 2016, each Minnesota State campus submitted responses to a set of open ended questions that asked campuses to describe how they were currently addressing issues related to and/or planning for online education. Campuses were also asked to provide feedback and/or suggest what Minnesota State could do collectively to support online education efforts. These questions were divided into four broad categories including access, quality, affordability and collaboration.

Responses to this questionnaire were analyzed by the Organizational Effectiveness Research Group (OERG), which is managed by a nationally recognized Graduate Program in Industrial/Organizational Psychology at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

The ad hoc workgroup was provided with the analysis from the OERG (see Appendix A), the raw data responses from each campus, and a qualitative dataset (see Appendix B) provided as context to common, and often erroneous assertions made about the state of online education in Minnesota State. Data included were demographics of students enrolled in online courses, the performance of these students, the levels and fields of study by students enrolled in online courses, and amount of online course offerings that currently take place throughout Minnesota State.

Additional reports, resources and data from national associations, like EDUCAUSE were also made available to the workgroup for consideration.

As the workgroup considered strategies that could advance online education, they were asked to use the primary and secondary sources listed above to support the fifteen (15) strategies that were developed. The

workgroup then developed a set of action steps they believed should be pursued in order to advance each corresponding strategy.

Each action item was further categorized for its potential to positively impact student outcomes, compete against other higher education providers, and/or its potential to make online education more efficient or effective. The intention to categorize these action steps is to help align each action item with an intended purpose.

Goals

For the purpose of this document, we define a goal as a broad aspirational outcome that we strive to attain. Four goal areas guide this document. These goal areas include access, quality, affordability and collaboration. Below is a description of each goal area and the assumptions made for Minnesota State.

1. **Access - Our online education strategy must ensure students have broad access and success to higher education across the state**

Online education is *one of the ways* in which Minnesotans can access higher education. Individual institutions and Minnesota State, as a whole, should make online education options and online services available to potential and existing students, in a manner that is consistent with other in-person educational options. Access efforts should include enrollment growth, intentionally attracting and recruiting students into Minnesota State for whom online education is the best or only educational option. In addition, institutions have online education as an appropriate augmentation to course options.

Over twenty percent of existing Minnesota State students enroll in online courses as a way to satisfy course requirements. For some students, online education is a convenient option; for others, online is the only option available. When confronted with limited options to complete required courses at their home institution, students who do not want to delay their academic progress, seek out online courses, which are not bound by a specific location or time.

At Minnesota State institutions, the majority of student enrollment in online education has been in individual online courses rather than completely online programs. For-profit and private non-profit institutions continue to be highly effective in recruiting potential Minnesota State students to enroll in online and flexible degree programs, largely because they are highly resourced and designed to cater to the needs of online students. For institutions that see online education as a way for Minnesota State to strategically grow enrollment.

2. **Quality: Our online courses, programs, and services must be of consistent high quality across colleges and universities**

Often times, the topic of quality is often raised as somehow being unique to online course. The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) accreditation guidelines review the standards and processes institutions have in place to ensure quality in all of educational offerings, including online. Individual institutions are best positioned to define, assess, and ensure quality in online education offerings. There are a number of ways in which institutions have demonstrated quality in individual courses and programs including the evaluation of course design, evaluation of instruction and assessment of student learning outcomes

3. Affordability - Online education must be affordable for our students with its value proposition clearly expressed

Ongoing financial and human resources that support the technical infrastructure, professional development, and student services are required for the continued success of online education. In order to support these efforts, almost all Minnesota State institutions choose to apply a differential tuition rate to courses that are offered online. If we intend to have online education continue to be an affordable solution for students, Minnesota State and its institutions must be good stewards of these funds and ensure these funds support online education.

Online education requires different or additional services that need to be funded; current tuition is not high even though it may not be affordable to all students; campuses are relying on tuition as operating revenue as currently established; brick and mortar costs stay constant even as more students take online classes; system and individual colleges and universities need to position themselves effectively within the market and that requires investment; transparency is important in tuition setting—students want to know why there is variability; benefit to consistent approach to setting tuition. Inherited certain models and approaches and may not be able to start from scratch

4. Collaboration - Our online education strategy must draw on our collective strengths and resources

There are existing collaborations related to online education throughout Minnesota State. Distance Minnesota is comprised of four institutions (Alexandria Technical & Community College, Bemidji State University, Northland Community & Technical College, and Northwest Technical College) which collaborate to offer student support services, outreach, e-advising, faculty support, and administrative assistance for online education offerings. In addition, child development instructors from fifteen colleges worked together through the e-lect program to offer child development courses online to avoid duplication and make the best use of limited resources. These existing efforts show how colleges and universities can collaborate with one another to provide online education and online services to enhance enrollment, to help student make progress to their degree when course sections are unavailable, and to help support low-enrolled courses/programs by consolidating efforts around the state.

Strategies

In this document, strategies are defined as the overall plan used to identify how we can achieve each goal area. A brief background is provided for each strategy to describe what Minnesota State is currently doing to address this area.

Action Steps

Within each strategy are action steps that describe the specific actions to be taken in order to advance a specific strategy. Action steps include those items that allow Minnesota State to improve upon the ways we currently operate, as well as items that allow Minnesota State to fundamentally change the way we operate.

Access

Our online education strategy must ensure students have broad access and success to higher education across the state

Strategy 1: Ensure all student have online access to high quality support services.

The Online Learning Consortium suggests that students enrolled in online education experiences should have access to “three areas of support including academic (such as tutoring, advising, and library); administrative (such as financial aid, and disability support); and technical (such as hardware reliability and uptime, and help desk).”¹ While many campuses provide access to these services at a space on campus, students enrolled in online courses or programs often have unequal access to these services when participating at a distance. It is true that some campuses have developed ways to support students at a distance, but often do so under special circumstances and not as something that is a common practice. It is important for students at a distance who participate in online courses and programs receive comparable support services as their peers who are on campus. As a system, students have access to a handful of statewide services, include tutoring services through Smarthinking and test proctoring sites. Awareness of these services and variability of how campuses offer these services continues to be an issue for students and faculty members.

Informed by: Organizational Effectiveness Research Group. (2016). *Online Strategy Survey Results & Recommendations*. Minnesota State University, Mankato, MN.

- Page 12 – 259 comments referenced student resources and support
- Page 13 – “Important themes varied across the three parts of the Access focus area. However, Student Resources and Support and Technology and Related Support were consistently in the top five across all three parts of the Access questionnaire.”
- Page 16 – “Specifically, most institutions conveyed the desire for more standardized structure and support with faculty training, student readiness assessments, and *24/hour technology support and/or tutoring services*. Also, most institutions mentioned academic advising as an area for improvement regarding online programs and courses.”

	Action Steps to help us improve upon the ways we currently operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
1A*	Statewide Student Support Center - Minnesota State should provide its institutions and their students with access to a centralized support center during extended hours managed by staff who can assist students synchronously via phone, chat, text/SMS, or web conference. Staff at this support center would be there to supplement, not replace, the human or financial resources campuses currently provide to their students. The mission of the support center is to be there for students when they need help navigating the learning environment.	Collaboration 1A	Academic and Student Affairs with consultation by campuses	X	X	X

¹ See Quality Framework – Access – Retrieved from <https://onlinelearningconsortium.org/about/quality-framework-five-pillars/> on May 12, 2017.

1B	Test proctoring available online - Determine the financial feasibility of procuring online proctoring services for courses delivered online.		Academic and Student Affairs	X		X
1C	Test proctoring available in person – Establish and maintain requirements (test security, environmental controls, etc.) for campuses that offer existing place based proctoring services.		Academic and Student Affairs in collaboration with campuses	X		

	Action Steps to fundamentally change the way we operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
1D	Captioning Services - Create a statewide staffing unit to provide closed captioning service for campus requests		Shared service among campuses System Office External Entity	X		X

Strategy 2: Establish and maintain measures to assess and support student readiness for online education.

There are numerous anecdotes of students who enroll in online courses, but neglect to log in to the learning management system or those who log in infrequently. A persistent issue for campuses has been to ensure that students who enroll in online course are aware of the expectations required to participate actively in an online course. In addition to adhering to course expectations, students must have the technical competencies needed to perform the tasks required for online courses. The traditional approach to support student readiness has been to communicate the course expectations to students before enrolling and/or to provide some form of a survey or orientation. Although these efforts do a good job of alerting students of course expectations, they do little to support students whose obligations beyond school (work, family, etc.) or inattentiveness to course work can hinder their academic performance.

Informed by Organizational Effectiveness Research Group. (2016). *Online Strategy Survey Results & Recommendations*. Minnesota State University, Mankato, MN.

- Page 12 - 74 comments referenced student readiness
- Page 16 – “Specifically, student readiness was a major concern for most. Institutions would like to have a way of measuring a student’s readiness for an online program before enrollment and feel often times students are unprepared for the rigor of online learning.”

- Page 16 – “Specifically, most institutions conveyed the desire for more standardized structure and support with faculty training, *student readiness assessments*, and 24/hour technology support and/or tutoring services. Also, most institutions mentioned academic advising as an area for improvement regarding online programs and courses.”

	Action Steps to help us improve upon the ways we currently operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
2A	A self-paced online orientation resource that allows students to practice the cognitive tasks (reading written materials, writing an analysis, etc.) and technical tasks (navigating to course readings, posting to a discussions area, submitting an assignment, etc.) required to participate an online course. Student’s completion of this orientation would allow access to register to an online course section.		Academic and Student Affairs with review by campuses	X		X
2B	Sharable/Customizable Documents Online Expectations - Develop customizable documents that faculty members can utilize in their course that detail expectation for participating in an online course.		Academic and Student Affairs with review by campuses			X

	Action Steps to fundamentally change the way we operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
2C	Limit Registration - Request that Minnesota State institutions identify a reasonable amount of time (within one week of registration) during which students are no longer able to register for online classes. The purpose is to ensure that students enrolling in online courses are prepared for the experience.		Campuses in consultation with System Office	X		X
2D	Sharing Research on student success in online - Fund regular research studies that provide current data on Minnesota State student and national data on key elements for student success in the online environment and disseminate that information to institutions and faculty, with training provided to apply and improve.		Academic and Student Affairs in collaboration with campuses			X

Strategy 3: Ensure students have access to online and blended learning experiences in course and program offerings.

Due to financial needs, those responsible for scheduling courses at Minnesota State campuses try to optimize the number of course sections offered by using a variety of delivery modes to meet student needs. These efforts are complicated when decisions needed to be made about cancelling sections, adjusting the max enrollment for each course section, or running courses based on low fill-rate. These are complex exercises for any individual campus to perform on their own, but this can be exponentially complicated when trying to collaborate on offering online sections of a similar course at different campuses.

Informed by: Organizational Effectiveness Research Group. (2016). *Online Strategy Survey Results & Recommendations*. Minnesota State University, Mankato, MN.

- Page 12 - 121 comments referenced standardization and collaboration across institutions, which included topics like a standardized calendar, communication to student, course credit and numbers, enrollment, and incentives.
- Page 16 - “There is a desire for a more standardized and convenient way for students to enroll across institutions. A specific suggestion that was mentioned a couple times was to have one standardized way for students to find other courses at other institutions and register for them. One comment in particular said Minnesota State should provide the structure of the house and allow individual institutions to decorate it”

	Action Steps to help us improve upon the ways we currently operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
3A	Cross-Institutional Scheduling for Online Courses (Sections) - Develop a process that institutions can use to collaborate on academic planning and to optimize course offerings by scheduling online sections in collaboration with each other based on a specific need (program requirements, low fill-rates, transfer pathways offerings, Twin Cities Baccalaureate, etc.)	Collaboration 4B	Shared service among campuses or System Office in collaboration with Campuses	X	X	X
3B	Academic Planning for Online Offerings – Coordinate offerings of high need/demand areas that are best served by online		Shared service among campuses or System Office in collaboration with Campuses	X	X	X

	Action Steps to fundamentally change the way we operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
3C	Targeting Marketing Campaign - Provide a statewide marketing campaign focus based on need (rural, disadvantaged populations) to build awareness of existing fully online degree programs and courses offered throughout the state by Minnesota State Institutions		Shared service among campuses or System Office in collaboration with Campuses	X	X	
3D	Complete market analyses - to identify where Minnesota State could have a strategic advantage (twin cities baccalaureate, graduate education, etc.) or advance other goals aimed at increasing enrollment (completion transfer pathways, twin cities baccalaureate)	Collaboration 4A	System Office in collaboration with Campuses	X	X	
3E	Graduate Programming - Identify and provide seed funding to critically needed graduate program offerings where online education is an appropriate approach.		Shared service among campuses or System Office in collaboration with Campuses	X	X	X

Strategy 4: These experiences should support and recognize diverse learning needs by applying a universal design for learning framework.

The OERG report included several references to efforts made by campuses related to the providing support and resources for universal design for learning, the workgroup did not offer any action steps.

	Action Steps to help us improve upon the ways we currently operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency

N/A					
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Action Steps to fundamentally change the way we operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
			improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
N/A					

Strategy 5: Expand access to professional development resources and services for faculty members

As online course are developed and while faculty members teach online courses, it is critical that faculty members have on-demand access to resources like technical support and course assistance.

Informed by: Organizational Effectiveness Research Group. (2016). *Online Strategy Survey Results & Recommendations*. Minnesota State University, Mankato, MN.

- Page 12 - 47 comments referenced improving functionality and user design of Minnesota State online services
- Page 16 - “Respondents expressed interest in professional development opportunities for faculty (and incentives and funding for these), faculty training, support in content development, and *ongoing technical support throughout the teaching processes*. Investment in faculty resources and support are believed to be the best way to ensure quality online learning.”

Action Steps to help us improve upon the ways we currently operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
			improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
5A * Statewide Faculty Support Services - Minnesota State provide its institutions and their faculty members with access to a centralized support center during extended hours with staff that can assist faculty members synchronously via phone, chat, text/SMS, or web conference. Staff at this support center would be there to supplement, not replace, the human or financial resources campuses currently provide to their students. The mission		Academic and Student Affairs with consultation by campuses			X

	of the support center is to be there for faculty members when they need help performing a task or function within the learning environment.					
5B	Research on student success in online education - Encourage faculty research into national standards and practices for online student success in the online environments for diverse student populations at the disciplinary as well as overall level of application.		Academic and Student Affairs in collaboration with campuses	X		X

	Action Steps to fundamentally change the way we operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
5C *	Instructional Design and Technology Services - Establish a unit that will provide course design and instructional technology services to selected programs and courses from Minnesota State institutions.		Shared service among campuses or System Office in collaboration with Campuses	X		X

Strategy 6: Monitor and influence regulatory environments to ensure that students maintain access to online educational opportunities

Complying with and being informed of information related to the state authorization of distance education is needed to ensure Minnesota State institutions can continue to offer educational opportunities to prospective students.

	Action Steps to help us improve upon the ways we currently operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency

6A	State Authorization - Create and maintain a resource for institutions compliance with the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement		Shared service among campuses or System Office with consultation by campuses		X	X
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	Action Steps to fundamentally change the way we operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
6B	Legislative Actions - Determine legislative priorities what do we want to happen and how can legislation support that direction?		Shared service among campuses or System Office with consultation by campuses		X	

Quality

Our online courses, programs, and services must be of consistent high quality across colleges and universities

Strategy 1: Establish and maintain a statewide approach for professional development for online education

As noted in the OERG report, “faculty members are a large part of ensuring high quality online learning.” In addition to support provided through individual campuses, it is important for Minnesota State to make available professional development opportunities to interested faculty members.

Informed by: Organizational Effectiveness Research Group. (2016). *Online Strategy Survey Results & Recommendations*. Minnesota State University, Mankato, MN.

- Page 11 - 282 comments were related to faculty resources and support, which included areas faculty mentoring, faculty training, peer review/course evaluations, and professional development
- Page 5 – “Strong emphasis placed on faculty (training, support in development of course content, course evaluations, etc.). Specifically, institutions would like more peer review/course evaluations of online courses to help strategize and evolve in the right direction. Many institutions also either spoke of their involvement with Quality Matters (QM) or support for further involvement with QM.”
- Page 16 – “Perhaps unsurprisingly, most institutions deem faculty to be a large part of ensuring high quality online learning. Respondents expressed interest in professional development opportunities for faculty (and incentives and funding for these), faculty training, support in content development, and ongoing technical support throughout the teaching processes. Investment in faculty resources and support are believed to be the best way to ensure quality online learning.”

	Action Steps to help us improve upon the ways we currently operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
1A *	Certification for Online Teaching - Minnesota State will design, develop and sustain a world-class statewide certification for faculty members who wish to demonstrate their competency in designing and delivering effective online courses and programs.	Collaboration 2C	Shared service among campuses or System Office in collaboration with Campuses	X		X
1B	Faculty Mentoring - Provide and sustain faculty mentoring programs that promote effective online pedagogy.	Collaboration 2B	Shared service among campuses or	X		X

			System Office in collaboration with Campuses			
1C	Professional development for support staff - including instructional designers, D2L Brightspace site administrators and campus trainers, etc.)	Collaboration 2B	Shared service among campuses or System Office in collaboration with Campuses	X		X

	Action Steps to fundamentally change the way we operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
1D	Explicit Support in Professional Development Plans (PDPs) - Ensure that faculty and departments who seek professional development opportunities to improve online instruction have sufficient time and funds to learn and to apply what they learn in their courses.		System Office System Office in collaboration with Campuses			X

Strategy 2: Ensure campuses use an evidenced based and/or nationally benchmarked e.g. Quality Matters or Online Learning Consortium) tool for enhancing quality in online course design

Formed in 2012, the Minnesota Online Quality Initiative (MOQI) serves as a central entity with the goal of promoting quality course design for those course delivered in blended and online delivery modes. MOQI accomplishes this by facilitating training sessions, sharing information on course design practices, and provides opportunities for faculty members to review the design of their course. Central to the work of MOQI is the licensed use of the nationally recognized course design rubric provided by an organization called Quality Matters (QM). The QM rubric is rooted in 21 essential evidenced based standards that promote quality in online course design. Access and use of this rubric requires an institutional subscription to Quality Matters. The cost of this subscription has been reduced for campuses as Minnesota State has subsidized the total cost. With Minnesota State subsidizing the costs associated with Quality Matters, the use of the QM course design rubric, workshops, and course design certifications have been popular among the majority of Minnesota State institutions.

Some campuses have developed their own professional development programming that replace or supplement offerings available through Quality Matters. There is some interest in finding ways to provide additional faculty learning opportunities designed at local campuses.

Informed by: Organizational Effectiveness Research Group. (2016). *Online Strategy Survey Results & Recommendations*. Minnesota State University, Mankato, MN.

- Page 12 - 70 comments referred to Quality Matters.
- Page 5 - “Specifically, institutions would like more peer review/course evaluations of online courses to help strategize and evolve in the right direction. Many institutions also either spoke of their involvement with Quality Matters (QM) or support for further involvement with QM”

	Action Steps to help us improve upon the ways we currently operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
2A*	Course Design Standards - Provide a set of evidenced-based, peer reviewed tools or models that can be used to guide a quality assurance process for the design and development of courses. Ensure each campus use a quality assurance process for the design and development of courses.	Collaboration 2D	System Office System Office in collaboration with Campuses	X	X	X
2B	Funding opportunities – Funding for faculty to attend national conferences and workshops on best practices for online in general and in disciplinary-specific methods).		Campuses			X

	Action Steps to fundamentally change the way we operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency

Strategy 3: Ensure campuses have identified a process for evaluating and improving instruction for online courses

Just as is the practice in person courses, campuses should ensure peer review and/or evaluations of teaching are being conducted for online courses.

Informed by: Organizational Effectiveness Research Group. (2016). *Online Strategy Survey Results & Recommendations*. Minnesota State University, Mankato, MN.

- Page 11 - 50 of the 282 comments regarding faculty resources and support refer to peer review or course evaluations.

	Action Steps to help us improve upon the ways we currently operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
3A	Evaluating Online Instruction - Confirm that campuses have established a process for evaluating and improving instruction for courses delivered online that aligns with their campus accreditation plans.		Campuses	X		X

	Action Steps to fundamentally change the way we operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
	N/A					

Strategy 4: Ensure consistency of student learning outcomes among in person and online education offerings

Often times, the topic of quality is often raised as somehow being unique to online course. The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) accreditation guidelines review the standards and processes institutions have in place to ensure quality in all of educational offerings, including online. Individual institutions are best positioned to define, assess, and ensure quality in online education offerings. There are a number of ways in which institutions have demonstrated quality in individual courses and programs including the evaluation of course design, evaluation of instruction and assessment of student learning outcome.

Informed by: Organizational Effectiveness Research Group. (2016). *Online Strategy Survey Results & Recommendations*. Minnesota State University, Mankato, MN.

- Page 11 - 18 comments describe how online courses currently align with institutional program review.

	Action Steps to help us improve upon the ways we currently operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
4A	Student Learning Outcomes - Where it is the practice to collect and measure student learning outcomes for in person courses and programs, ensure campuses have established practices for those courses and programs that are offered online.		Campus	X		

	Action Steps to fundamentally change the way we operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
	N/A					

Strategy 5: Review, conduct, and share research in online education to improve quality.

As scholarly teachers, faculty members value opportunities to review educational literature to inform their own evidenced-based instructional practices. Furthermore, through the process of systematic inquiry, faculty members can make observations and collect data to analyze student learning outcomes.

Informed by: Organizational Effectiveness Research Group. (2016). *Online Strategy Survey Results & Recommendations*. Minnesota State University, Mankato, MN.

- Page 17 – “Overall, faculty appear to enjoy sharing best practices through workshops and conferences. They would like more opportunity and incentives to do so, especially with each other within the Minnesota State University and College System. Specifically, many find regularly scheduled meetings and CATT meetings particularly beneficial. Many mentioned wanting a standardized approach to faculty training and faculty mentoring. Specifically, standardized course evaluations to be able to conduct research on best practices and share these with each other.”

	Action Steps to help us improve upon the ways we currently operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on
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				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
5A	Research Opportunities - Develop and sustain funding for cadres of faculty members to develop curricular materials (to be shared) and to investigate and report on evidence-based approaches to teaching online.		System Office or Shared service among campuses			X
5B	Research Dissemination - Create a summit/conference/symposium opportunity where faculty members can share evidenced-based research and methods for teaching online.		System Office or Shared service among campuses			X

	Action Steps to fundamentally change the way we operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
	N/A					

Affordability

Online education must be affordable for our students with its value proposition clearly expressed

Strategy 1: Establish system guidelines operating instructions) for setting, justifying, and evaluating differential tuition.

Online education requires different or additional services that need to be funded. Even though it may not be affordable to all students, tuition at Minnesota State campuses is not high relative to private and for-private options. System and individual colleges and universities need to position themselves effectively within the market. Many campuses are currently relying on the differential between general and online tuition as operating revenue. While more students take online courses, “brick and mortar costs” stay constant. Because students want to know why there is variability in tuition for online courses, transparency is important when setting tuition for online education. There may be benefit to a consistent approach to setting tuition.

Informed by: Organizational Effectiveness Research Group. (2016). *Online Strategy Survey Results & Recommendations*. Minnesota State University, Mankato, MN.

- Page 16 – “Perhaps one of the largest concerns expressed was the high cost of online education for students. In terms of monetary resources, one popular answer was to simply lower the differential for online tuition. Others would be to apply for grants to open up more resource opportunities, lowering costs for online textbooks, contributing resources to student tutoring/advising, and using existing technical resources (D2L, etc.) to accomplish this. Also, some have shifted on-campus resources to online resources in response to the lack of funding towards online education.”

	Action Steps to help us improve upon the ways we currently operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
1A	Communicating Differential Tuition - Communicate link between differential tuition and media codes via operating instructions (or other simplified framework)		System Office in collaboration with Campuses		X	X
1B*	Models for Differential Tuition - Develop a model, formula, and/or decision tree to guide a systematic approach for how institutions determine and use online differential		System Office in collaboration with Campuses		X	X
1C	Communication - Establish a means for tracking and communicating national and global trends that might affect the guidelines to help Minnesota State campuses maintain a competitive advantage with respect to value		System Office with consultation by Campuses		X	

	Action Steps to fundamentally change the way we operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
1D	Cost Analysis – Perform an analysis on the impact to institutions if alternate pricing structures were pursued or an elimination of differential tuition for online courses.		System Office in collaboration with Campuses		X	

Strategy 2: Expand the use of quality, open educational resources (OER)

Minnesota State is promoting textbook affordability for students at colleges and universities by supporting and facilitating adoption of open, low-cost, high-quality materials. We strive to do through faculty development on evaluating open textbooks and grants and programing to support campus based OER creation and adoption. OERs will make education more affordable. Certainly, faculty members reserve the right to use whatever materials that meet their needs, but faculty members should be encouraged to investigate the feasibility of using OERs when the quality and availability of materials are satisfied. If students are making decisions not to buy textbooks because they are unaffordable, students will not have access to the resources they need, when they need them.

Informed by: Organizational Effectiveness Research Group. (2016). *Online Strategy Survey Results & Recommendations*. Minnesota State University, Mankato, MN.

- Page 16 – “Perhaps one of the largest concerns expressed was the high cost of online education for students. In terms of monetary resources, one popular answer was to simply lower the differential for online tuition. Others would be to apply for grants to open up more resource opportunities, lowering costs for online textbooks, contributing resources to student tutoring/advising, and using existing technical resources (D2L, etc.) to accomplish this. Also, some have shifted on-campus resources to online resources in response to the lack of funding towards online education.”

	Action Steps to help us improve upon the ways we currently operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency

2A*	Adopting Open Educational Resources (OERs) - Support for the creation, modification and adoption of more affordable and/or open educational resources includes ancillary materials. Provide incentives when curriculum are developed, programs created, and changes to program.		Campuses System Office in collaboration with Campuses	X	X	X
2B	Content Personalization - Invest in tools that allow students and faculty to personalize online content e.g., annotation, customization, retention		Campuses System Office in collaboration with Campuses	X		X

	Action Steps to fundamentally change the way we operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
2C	“Z” Degrees – “Z” (Zero) exploring a “z-degree” cost of curricular material degrees (see Tidewater, achieving the dream, data).		Campuses System Office in collaboration with Campuses	X	X	

Strategy 3: Streamline funding and access to shared services and technologies

Using the principle of economies of scale, Minnesota State can facilitate the partnering of schools with shared interests who might be able to share costs for procuring specific technologies or services to support online education.

Informed by: Organizational Effectiveness Research Group. (2016). *Online Strategy Survey Results & Recommendations*. Minnesota State University, Mankato, MN.

- Page 16 – “Perhaps one of the largest concerns expressed was the high cost of online education for students. In terms of monetary resources, one popular answer was to simply lower the differential for online tuition. Others would be to apply for grants to open up more resource opportunities, lowering costs for online textbooks, contributing resources to student tutoring/advising, and using existing technical resources (D2L, etc.) to accomplish this. Also, some have shifted on-campus resources to online resources in response to the lack of funding towards online education.”

	Action Steps to help us improve upon the ways we currently operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
3A	Identify and Prioritize Enterprise Funding - Process to gather data necessary to make decisions about which enterprise investments lead to cost savings balanced with outcomes prioritize those that save money and achieve intended outcomes.	Collaboration 1B	System Office in collaboration with Campuses			X
3B	Contracting for Services - Investigate how contracting with external vendors for select service affects costs and satisfaction. (For instance, providing a central call center for financial aid may provide students with responses to general questions and allow campus staff to focus on individualized services.)		System Office in collaboration with Campuses			X
3C	Shared Services Between Campuses – Establish common principles for identifying shared services and technologies, I.e., clear, transparent means to understand the type of services and technologies that lend themselves to shared services	Collaboration 1C	System Office or Shared service among campuses			X

	Action Steps to fundamentally change the way we operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
	N/A					

Collaboration

In a system as large as Minnesota State, there are long held practices in place that will be barriers to collaborate. In order to make meaningful progress in online education, it is important be open to examining our existing practices and look to find ways to overcome barriers.

Strategy 1: Identify and implement innovative shared service models for student support services.

Each of these actions steps are detailed in other areas.

	Action Steps to help us improve upon the ways we currently operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
1A	Statewide Student Support Center - Minnesota State should provide its institutions and their students with access to a centralized support center during extended hours managed by staff who can assist students synchronously via phone, chat, text/SMS, or web conference. Staff at this support center would be there to supplement, not replace, the human or financial resources campuses currently provide to their students. The mission of the support center is to be there for students when they need help navigating the learning environment.	Access 1A	Academic and Student Affairs with consultation by campuses	X	X	X
1B	Identify and Prioritize Enterprise Funding - Process to gather data necessary to make decisions about which enterprise investments lead to cost savings balanced with outcomes prioritize those that save money and achieve intended outcomes.	Affordability 3A	System Office in collaboration with Campuses			X
1C	Shared Services Between Campuses – Establish common principles for identifying shared services and technologies, I.e., clear, transparent means to understand the type of services and technologies that lend themselves to shared services	Affordability 3C	System Office or Shared service among campuses			X

Strategy 2: Offer faculty development that models and supports collaboration

	Action Steps to help us improve upon the ways we currently operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on
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				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
2A	Research Opportunities - Develop and sustain funding for cadres of faculty members to develop curricular materials (to be shared) and to investigate and report on evidence-based approaches to teaching online.	Quality 5A	System Office or Shared service among campuses			X
2B	Faculty Development - Focus on long-term professional development instructional design, peer mentoring (not just training).	Quality 1A, 1B, 1C, 2A	Academic and Student Affairs in collaboration with campuses	X		X
2C	Certification for Online Teaching - Minnesota State will design, develop and sustain a world-class statewide certification course for faculty members who wish to demonstrate their competency in designing and delivering an effective online course.	Quality 1A	Shared service among campuses or System Office in collaboration with Campuses	X		X
2D	Course Design Standards - Provide a set of evidenced-based, peer reviewed tools or models that can be used to guide a quality assurance process for the design and development of courses. Ensure each campus use a quality assurance process for the design and development of courses.	Quality 2A	System Office or System Office in collaboration with Campuses	X		X

Strategy 3: Support faculty collaboration on curriculum

The ability to draw on our collective strengths and resources when working to develop curriculum, programs, and courses. This is particularly valuable when Minnesota State is asked to address legislative actions (i.e. - Transfer Pathways, Developmental Educations) or Board of Trustee initiatives (i.e. - Twin Cities Baccalaureate).

Informed by: Organizational Effectiveness Research Group. (2016). *Online Strategy Survey Results & Recommendations*. Minnesota State University, Mankato, MN.

- Page 5 – “Currently institutions enjoy collaborating and sharing best practices by attending conferences, workshops, webinars, symposiums, etc. (e.g. Distance MN, POET, STAR Symposium). They would like to have more (and different) opportunities, incentives, and funding in the future in order to collaborate across institutions. They would also like to have ways to share online course materials, resources, online course structures, etc.”

	Action Steps to help us improve upon the ways we currently operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
	N/A					

	Action Steps to fundamentally change the way we operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
3A *	Collaborate on Curriculum - Facilitate faculty to faculty collaboration on the development of curricular materials by offering space, tools, financial/human support		Shared service among campuses or System Office in collaboration with Campuses			X
3B	Share Course Materials - Create a repository of resources to which faculty can contribute course materials – video lectures, rubrics, assignments, syllabi, learning activities, etc. that are designed for online learners. Recommend a peer review process and credentialing protocol so that faculty can name accepted contributions as part of their professional accomplishments.		Shared service among campuses or System Office in collaboration with Campuses			X

Strategy 4: Identify collaborations that result in strategic advantage, based on effective campus and system academic planning

	Action Steps to help us improve upon the ways we currently operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on
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				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
4A	Complete market analyses - to identify where Minnesota State could have a strategic advantage (twin cities baccalaureate, graduate education, etc.) or advance other goals aimed at increasing enrollment (completion transfer pathways, twin cities baccalaureate)	Access 3D	Shared service among campuses or System Office in collaboration with Campuses	X	X	X
4B	Cross-Institutional Scheduling for Online Courses (Sections) - Develop a process that institutions can use to collaborate on academic planning and to optimize course offerings by scheduling online sections in collaboration with each other based on a specific need (program requirements, low fill-rates, transfer pathways offerings, Twin Cities Baccalaureate, etc.)	Access 3A	Shared service among campuses or System Office in collaboration with Campuses	X	X	X

	Action Steps to fundamentally change the way we operate	Collaboration	Responsible Parties	Greatest impact on		
				improving student outcomes	marketplace competition	increasing effectiveness & efficiency
4C	Financial Incentives for Collaboration - Develop a process and criteria for providing financial incentives for collaborative development of programs		Shared service among campuses or System Office in collaboration with Campuses		X	X
4D*	Revenue Sharing Model - Develop a revenue sharing model used in conjunction for online courses		System Office in collaboration with Campuses		X	X

Appendix A - Online Strategy Survey Results & Recommendations

Prepared by Organizational Effectiveness Research Group. (2016). Minnesota State University, Mankato, MN.

Appendix B - State of the state of Online Education in Minnesota State

A "state of the state of Online Education" in Minnesota State was pulled together in April 2016. This report was used an attempt to provide context to assertions made about online education.

Appendix C - List of Prioritized Action Steps

Items to be reviewed 2017-2018 with implementation to start during the 2018-2019 Academic Year

	Strategy /Action	Description	Student Outcomes	Impact on Market Competition	Effectiveness & Efficiency
Access	1A	Statewide Student Support Center	1	1	1
Access	1B	Test proctoring available online	1		1
Access	1C	Test proctoring available in person	1		
Access	1D	Captioning Services	1		1
Access	2A	A self-paced online orientation resource	1		1
Access	2B	Sharable/Customizable Documents Online Expectations			1
Access	2C	Limit Registration	1		1
Access	2D	Sharing Research on student success in online			1
Access	3A	Cross-Institutional Scheduling for Online Courses (Sections)	1	1	1
Access	3B	Academic Planning for Online Offerings	1	1	1
Access	3C	Targeting Marketing Campaign	1	1	
Access	3D	Complete market analyses	1	1	
Access	3E	Graduate Programming	1	1	1
Access	5A	Statewide Faculty Support Services			1
Access	5B	Research on student success in online education	1		1
Access	5C	Instructional Design and Technology Services	1		1
Access	6A	State Authorization		1	1
Access	6B	Legislative Actions		1	
Quality	1A	Certification for Online Teaching	1	1	1
Quality	1B	Faculty Mentoring	1		1
Quality	1C	Professional development for support staff	1		
Quality	1D	Explicit Support in Professional Development Plans (PDPs)	1		1
Quality	2A	Course Design Standards	1		1
Quality	2B	Funding opportunities			1
Quality	3A	Evaluating Online Instruction	1		1
Quality	4A	Student Learning Outcomes	1		
Quality	5A	Research Opportunities			1
Quality	5B	Research Dissemination			1
Affordability	1A	Communicating Differential Tuition		1	1
Affordability	1B	Models for Differential Tuition		1	1
Affordability	1C	Communication		1	
Affordability	1D	Cost Analysis		1	
Affordability	2A	Adopting Open Educational Resources (OER)	1	1	1
Affordability	2B	Content Personalization	1		1
Affordability	2C	"Z" Degrees	1	1	
Affordability	3A	Identify and Prioritize Enterprise Funding			1
Affordability	3B	Contracting for Services			1
Affordability	3C	Shared Services Between Campuses			1
Collaboration	3A	Collaborate on Curriculum			1
Collaboration	3B	Share Course Materials			1
Collaboration	4C	Financial Incentives for Collaboration		1	1
Collaboration	4D	Revenue Sharing Model		1	1
Totals			23	17	33