

Report of the OLN Student Services Task Force, December 2000.

I Background

In March 2000, Ohio Learning Network (OLN) Executive Director Kate M. Carey established an Ohio Learning Network Student Services Task Force to explore student services issues related to the Ohio Learning Network. The Task Force accepted its charge as follows:

To develop a statewide student services strategy by December 1, 2000. Such a strategy should:

1. Explore statewide issues involved in web-based registration/admissions
2. Investigate enhancements to existing articulation and transfer policies and practices
3. Explore the feasibility of statewide financial aid policies and procedures for distance students
4. Investigate the best methods for student technical support for courses at a distance
5. Create an implementation plan for the strategy

Members of the Student Services Task Force were:

- Dr. Sunil Chand, Chair, Cuyahoga Community College
- Anthony Hartman, Intern, The Union Institute
- Mary Beth Aust-Keefer, Edison State Community College
- Dick Carpenter, Ohio Northern University
- Dave Darr, Wright State University
- Alan Escovitz, The Ohio State University
- Arman Habegger, University of Findlay
- Jim Hamberg, Columbus State Community College
- Ellen Klute, MU
- Christina Milano, Cleveland Scholarship Programs
- Tom Schick, Cuyahoga Community College
- Mindy Kannard, OLN

Ex Officio:

- David Barber, OLN
- Kate Carey, OLN
- Harold Horton, OBOR
- George Steele, OLN

From April 21 to December 8, 2000, the Student Services Task Force met five times, including once successfully on VTEL. All task force members were invited to actively participate on sub-task forces i.e., 1) Financial Aid and 2) Administration and Records). In addition, various individuals were brought in to assist the Student Services Task Force by contributing relevant, consistent, and valuable information. Their energetic and comprehensive presentations and discussions led the Task Force to a lucid and coherent view of where the Ohio Learning Network is and where it ought to go in regard to student services.

II Introduction

At the onset, the Task Force established a set of broad conceptual contexts to guide its work. These were sent as recommendations to the OLN Board and are as follows:

- 1 For all OLN student services operations, the virtual environment should be the guiding principle. OLN services should be designed for digital delivery with the highest capacities of those technologies in mind.

If adopted, this recommendation will require an orientation for OLN services that will be qualitatively different than the orientations used for institutional and even consortial decision-making now. EDI and other e-commerce protocols, for instance, will become basic features of OLN design. Certainly, for student services, this approach is fundamental. Issues of funding and of statewide collaborative development arise from adopting this position.

- 2 OLN must a) add value for all clients, otherwise there will no incentive for them to use it, b) OLN should not outpace the technologies available on campuses, and c) OLN should, rather than adding any burden to campuses, help alleviate load through technology and leveraging of resources.

- 3 OLN should make policy and procedural recommendations for the different student populations using OLN, i.e., students seeking courses or degrees totally at a distance, students taking an occasional distance learning course, K-12 students interested in Post Secondary Option or perhaps even courses toward a "Virtual High School", and traditional resident students who sought distance courses to 'fill out' a schedule. The Task Force recognized that non-credit offerings will need to be considered for OLN support shortly, and that these may require a separate set of student services.

- 4 A clear differentiation needs to be made between student information systems used by OLN and by its participating institutions. Each institution has an integrated Student Information System that will have to be utilized "institution by institution" for tracking the matriculation and progress of students using the OLN catalog. OLN itself will not be responsible for the registration and/or tracking of students registering for course offering. OLN will, however, need to develop its own database so that OLN will be able to gather and report on aggregate data concerning its effectiveness in relation to its mission. Such a database should comply with the OBOR Higher Education Information (HEI) standards and integrate with HEI for reporting purposes.

- 5 OLN must always be distinguished from its participating institutions. OLN is not a university, does not develop and offer courses, awards no grades or credentials, and does not manage student and academic services for matriculated students. OLN should not engage in these activities.

OLN provides access and value-added student services to students in the distance, digital arena, and should always advocate for the development and support of services that will facilitate student matriculation and progress. Examples of services that are essential to OLN student success are CAS, DARS, OhioLink, on-line book procurement, on-line counseling and tutorial services, facilitating access to financial aid, ADA compliance issues, ease of communication between the student information systems at the various

participating institutions and OLN, and degree/program planning and advisement.

III OLN Policy Issues that were addressed by the Student Services Task Force (SSTF):

Over the course of the past eight months and in response to its charge, the Student Services Task Force identified and addressed the following issues:

Pricing

1. How will campuses price distance courses? If all the courses are listed in the catalog side-by-side, some people believe that the institutions with higher tuition may lose students. Should an overall Price – that is, an Electronic Price be created for all OLN courses?

SSTF RECOMMENDATION: Pricing is and will remain an institutional decision. The OLN catalog should present courses and course fees as submitted by the institutions and let students decide their selections.

2. How will campuses receive subsidy for OLN courses? If a student takes a course at Owens Community College and three courses at Bowling Green and two at Findlay and three more at Ohio University, who gets the subsidy?

SSTF RECOMMENDATION: Subsidy will follow the student. That is, the institution where the student is registered will be the institution that receives subsidy for those student hours.

Quarters and Semesters

1. If distance learning really means, anytime, anyplace, then what happens to the traditional 15-week semester or 10-week quarter?
2. If DL means anytime, anyplace, when is a course completed?

SSTF RECOMMENDATION: As courses are offered and managed by individual institutions, these matters are handled by policies at individual institutions. OLN's purpose should be to inform students of the variations and alternatives DL makes possible.

Student Support Services

1. Will students be required to pay a registration or admissions fee for every OLN course? That could be hundreds of dollars if students take several courses from several institutions. Do we want one-OLN "admissions" fee and if so how is it administered?

SSTF RECOMMENDATION: This was the first major issue that the Task Force dealt with. In brief, the Task Force recommends that OLN create one common application form which would give a student continuing access to any course(s) on the OLN system. OLN would host the common form which will be communicated to each participating institution as needed using secure data transmission. Each such institution may enhance admissions requirements on its own site as needed. The entire system must meet FERPA requirements.

The student would pay an application fee to OLN only once and thereafter be identified to OLN and participating institutions as an OLN student. Individual institutions may, however, add other fees later for matriculation as a degree seeking student at a home institution (see also recommendation on financial aid, below), for enrollment in courses other than those catalogued by OLN , graduation, or other reasons.

It is understood that the OLN application fee would guarantee only that the student need not pay more than once to access the OLN catalog and request registration in OLN listed courses. Acceptance into any specific course will not be guaranteed by OLN. Course fees for each course will continue to be assessed by and paid to the appropriate institution.

The Task Force is aware that this recommendation may conflict with individual institutional admissions policies. It may require an additional subsidy from OBOR in order to offset losses in application fee income. It will also require OLN to deploy on-line resources and staff to implement it seamlessly. However, from the point of view of the customer, a single application fee and form is deemed essential. The Task Force identifies multiple forms and fees as a critical barrier to OLN's success.

A fuller discussion of the issue is found in the OLN position paper on the Ohio Shared Application System (OSAS), appended herewith.

SSTF has created a template of a single application on-line form (see Appendix 3). If the recommendation to adopt such a form is accepted, this template will need to be refined and carefully negotiated with participating institutions, including their A&R and computer services divisions.

The Task Force recommends that the shared form and single fee be tested in the pilot consortial activity already under way by KSU, CSCC, SCC and OU.

2. How will a distance student receive tutoring for a course if needed?

SSTF RECOMMENDATION: The OLN Principles of Good Practice call for individual institutions to provide for such service. The Task Force recommends that OLN not engage in this activity beyond informing students of the need to explore options with the institutions concerned.

3. How will distance students access traditional resources – libraries or computer labs, for example? Suppose a student is taking a distance course from University of Cincinnati, but lives in Youngstown. Can he or she use the YSU libraries?

SSTF RECOMMENDATION: As above for 2. An OhioLINK committee is investigating student access to library resources (physical resources, interlibrary loan, or a reference librarian).

4. How will student tests be given? Will they be proctored at sites and if so, who pays to proctor 10 students taking a course from Columbus State, but living in Cleveland?

SSTF RECOMMENDATION: OLN Principles of Good Practice include this matter as an institutional decision. SSTF recommends that OLN not engage with this issue directly unless a large number of institutions report problems. OLN could, however, aid institutions by placing resources for proctoring, such as libraries and the OSU Extension Service, which has offices in all 88 counties, on its web site. SSTF also recommended that OLN reinforce to participating colleges and universities that an overarching philosophy of the distance education efforts in Ohio as facilitated by OLN were to remove barriers to student achievement.

5. How will students be authenticated? How can we make sure the work is really done by the student registered?

SSTF RECOMMENDATION: As above

6. How will financial aid be assessed and distributed?

SSTF RECOMMENDATION: This is the second major issue examined in detail by the SSTF. OLN cannot itself assess and distribute aid. These are institutional activities. Having said that, OLN should provide the impetus to participating institutions for making arrangements for financial aid that serve students effectively.

When the student is attending only one institution, financial aid issues are rather easily resolved and the aid can be administered in a straight-forward fashion. Distance learning adds complexity because the student may have a home institution but take courses from one or more other institutions. Documenting registrations and costs, evaluating level of enrollment, insuring that the courses taken elsewhere have received prior approval for transfer back to the home institution are issues that must be satisfactorily resolved before the student is awarded the financial aid for which he/she may be eligible.

In our past non-distance-learning environment, we have used the consortium agreement to document the coursework taken elsewhere—a piece of paper taken by the student to the home school's registrar, then to the visited institution, then back to the home school's financial aid office. It assured the student that the courses at the visited institution would be accepted by the home institution, assured the financial aid office that the visited institution would monitor attendance and withdrawal, and established the credit hours and the costs for same that the home institution could use to determine enrollment level and financial aid eligibility.

In moving to the distance learning environment we are expanding the options for students and the greater likelihood of not just one but of multiple consortium agreements of an electronic variety. How do we remove barriers and make this process as simple as possible—for both the student and the institution?

SSTF recommends that:

The student must declare as seeking a degree or certificate, and
The institution granting the degree or certificate, designated the home school, have the responsibility of administering the aid for that student

OLN should facilitate this process by having itself recognized as a consortium of all participating institutions. Such a consortium would then permit a student-designated home institution to assess and distribute aid for itself and for other institutions at which a student may be taking classes. Each institution would be responsible for monitoring attendance, maintaining records,

awarding grades, and meeting other financial aid obligations. Transcripts would be sent to the home institution which would assess overall eligibility for aid and other central requirements.

A model exists at the University of Texas "Telecampus." The pilot by KSU, CSCC, SC and OU should add this activity to their plans.

In the near future, OLN should apply to the US DOE demonstration project to develop its model for consortium-based distance education financial aid. In such a model, if OLN wishes, it, as a central authority may possibly be authorized to grant aid for all distance learning programs among the colleges in the state.

7. How can we monitor attendance for financial aid purposes?

SSTF RECOMMENDATION: See above

8. How will pre-enrollment student assessment take place – math placement tests or foreign language placement tests, for example?

SSTF RECOMMENDATION: As above – this is an institutional matter.

Articulation, Transfer and Graduation

This is the third major issue dealt with by the SSTF.

1. Will residency requirements remain in effect for distance students?

SSTF RECOMMENDATION: Residency is an institutional requirement to be met for award of a degree. Students must be made aware of their home institutions residency requirements for degree completion and graduation. OLN should reinforce that position on its website, and in all advising, so that students are not surprised to find they have not met the residency requirements when they get close to graduating.

2. If students are taking a multiple of courses from multiple campuses, who will guide them to a degree program? Or, how do we prevent students from taking 200 hours from a variety of campuses and then demanding a degree?

SSTF RECOMMENDATION: As above. This must continue to be a home institution responsibility. SSTF does strongly support the OLN value-added program of student advising through DL Specialists and the website. Guidance through the special conditions of taking on-line courses and on-line degree planning is not common and OLN has taken a powerful step with advising services. SSTF sees these as fundamental to student success and to OLN maintaining. However, the student must be made to rely on the advising services provided by the home institution when considering any course to meet a degree requirement.

In this regard, SSTF recommends that OLN strongly advocate for universal use of CAS/DARS in the state. These instruments are essential to effective articulation and program planning for OLN students but use is currently limited only to those institutions that have built and maintained their CAS/DARS records. OLN distance learning specialists cannot be expected to advise on all variations of articulation, transfer and graduation and students themselves will find navigating this complex ground a huge barrier. The digital solution is appropriate and even necessary.

OLN should develop recommendations regarding on-line commencement exercises.

Other Value-Added Services

SSTF strongly endorses the academic advising services deployed by OLN. These should be enhanced by a variety of on-line services, including FAQ's, on-line self assessment for compatibility with distance learning, on-line customer satisfaction ratings, on-line career services, on-line referrals to information sources on issues such as scholarships, tutoring, book procurement, and employment. SSTF has prepared a draft of an on-line customer survey to be used in order to assess the profile of existing users of OLN services (see Appendix 2). It has collected examples from Ohio colleges of self-assessment instruments assessing compatibility for distance learning. SSTF recommends that OLN adopt such instruments.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the SSTF

Sunil Chand, Chair
Tony Hartman, Intern/Member

Appendices

I Ohio Learning Network Principles of Good Practice

The Principles of Good Practice, the cornerstone of this electronic access to Ohio higher education, were developed to assure students about the quality of courses and programs at the on-line course catalog. The Principles draw upon the work of other organizations, such as the North Central Accrediting Association, the Southwestern Ohio Council for Higher Education, the Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications, and the Southern Regional Educational Board. All courses and programs to be listed in the on-line course catalog have been reviewed against the Principles of Good Practice by the offering colleges or universities.

Basic Assumptions

Several assumptions are central to these principles:

1. The program or course offered at a distance is provided by or through an institution that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting body and authorized to operate in the state where the program or course originates.
2. The institution's programs and courses holding specialized accreditation meet the same requirements when offered at a distance.
3. The institution may be a single institution or a consortium of institutions.
4. These principles are generally applicable to all courses and programs—degree or certificate programs and to credit or non-credit courses.
5. It is the institution's responsibility to review educational programs and courses it provides at a distance and ensure continued compliance with these principles.
6. Institutions offering programs or for-credit courses are responsible for satisfying all in-state approval and accreditation requirements before students are enrolled.

Instruction and Courses

1. Each program or course of study results in learning appropriate to the rigor and breadth of the degree or certificate awarded.
2. A degree or certificate program or course offered at a distance is coherent and complete.
3. The course provides for appropriate interaction between faculty and students and among students.
4. Qualified faculty provides appropriate supervision of the program or course that is offered at a distance.
5. Academic standards for all programs or courses offered at a distance are the same as those for courses delivered at the institution where the programs originate.
6. Student outcomes in programs or courses delivered at a distance should be the same in quality as student outcomes in the same programs or courses offered at the campus where they originate.

7. Institutions will take whatever steps necessary to ensure that the student registered in a course is the student actually completing the work. As appropriate, verification will include proctored examinations with careful checking of identification. OLN member institutions will cooperate in these and other efforts essential to maintaining the integrity of degree programs.

Student Services

1. The program or course provides students with clear, complete, and timely information on the curriculum, course and degree requirements, nature of faculty/student interaction, prerequisite technology competencies and skills, technical equipment requirements, availability of academic support services, financial aid resources, and costs and payment policies.
2. Enrolled students have reasonable and adequate access to the range of student services and resources appropriate to support their learning. Among the resources available are advising services, admissions, registration and scheduling, and information about student financial aid.
3. The institution has admission/acceptance criteria in place to assess whether the student has the background, knowledge, and technical skills required for undertaking the course/program.
4. Advertising, recruiting, and admissions materials clearly and accurately represent the program and the services available.

Commitment to Support

1. The home institution demonstrates a commitment to ongoing support, both financial and technical, and where possible to continuation of the program or course for a period sufficient for students to complete a degree or certificate.

Evaluation and Assessment

The institution agrees to evaluate annually the outcomes of its distance learning offerings. Criteria for evaluation include the following:

1. program and course effectiveness, including annual assessments of student learning, student recruitment and retention, and student and faculty satisfaction.
2. assessment and documentation of student achievement in each course at the completion of the program or course.
3. accuracy of program or course announcements and electronic catalog entries.
4. reasonable levels of resources available to students.
5. equivalent academic standards of distance courses or programs, as compared to those same classes offered through traditional delivery methods.
6. appropriate interaction between faculty and students and among students.
7. reasonable levels of student services, including advisement, admission, registration and scheduling and information regarding financial aid.

If "yes" please answer questions 9 and 10.

9. When you contacted the Ohio Learning Network Distance Learning Specialist in your region of Ohio, what kind of information were you looking for? (Check all that apply.)

- Information about coursework
- Information about degrees or certificates
- General Information about distance learning
- Financial aid information
- Other, please specify:

10. Was the distance learning specialist able to assist you? Yes No

If no, please explain

11. Since visiting the Ohio Learning Network Web site, what have you done?

Check all that apply.

- Registered for a class
- Requested more information about courses or degrees at a distance
- Applied for financial aid
- Filled out one or more college applications
- I need more help before I take any action steps.
- Have done nothing

12. Since visiting the OLN Web site, have you experienced any barriers in pursuing your academic goals? Yes No

If yes, please explain:

13. Where do you use a computer?

- At home
- At Work
- Both home and work
- No regular access to a computer

14. Where do you have access to the Internet?

- At home
- At Work
- Both home and work
- No regular access to the Internet

Age: ___under 18___ 18-21___ 22-29___ 30-39___ 40-49___ 50+

How many hours/week do you work? ___I don't work less than 10___ 10-20___ 21-39___ 40

What is your zip code?

Would you be willing to be contacted by phone to answer a few additional survey questions?

Yes No

If yes, please provide your telephone number and time of day we can contact you.

Thank you for your time and willingness to complete this survey.

Submit

III Ohio Shared Application: Proposed on-line Form

Name: First/Middle/Last

Previous Name(s) (if applicable):

Permanent Address:

Billing Address:

(If same as above, leave blank):

E-Mail Address:

Phone (Home): (____ - ____ - _____)

Phone (Work): (____ - ____ - _____)

Phone (Fax): (____ - ____ - _____)

Social Security Number: (____ - ____ - _____)

Date of Birth: (MM/DD/YY)

Gender: (Male/Female)

Ethnicity (Drop Window):

(Need to identify values/table):

Drop Window: Home Institution: (Link appropriate contact e-mail to Institution):

Drop Window: Host Institution: (Link appropriate contact e-mail to Institution):

Academic Year and Term:

Course Prefix: (3-5 Characters): ENG

Course Number: (3-4 Characters): 101

Course Title: (35 Characters): English Composition I

Credit Hours (Drop Window): (1 – 12)

Academic System (Drop Window): (Quarter Hours/Semester Hours)

NOTE: (May need an option to be able to register for more than one course!)

Are you a degree-seeking student? (YES/NO)

What are you seeking (Skip if NO above)? (Associate/Bachelors/Masters, Etc.)

Do you have approval to take this course? (YES/NO)

(Approval from Home Institution)

Are you receiving Federal Financial Aid? (YES/NO)

Credit Card Number (16 character field): (____ - ____ - ____ - ____)

(Master Card/Visa/Date of Expiration): (MM/YY)

Credit Card Authorization Form (if Applicable):

List FERPA Statement/Policy Prior to Submit Button

Submit Button