

UNCG 2003-08 Distance Learning Plan

Mission

UNCG's distance learning programs enhance and support the University's core mission of providing outstanding learning opportunities to all students.

Vision

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro will become the provider of choice in selected programs for distance learners across the State and beyond. UNCG will become nationally recognized for its innovative, high-quality distance learning programs.

Goals

The UNCG Strategic Plan for 2003-2008 calls for enrolling 2,000 distance learners by 2008. To accomplish that goal, the University will need to increase its distance learning efforts dramatically—by 275%—from its 2002-03 enrollment. Intermediate enrollment goals will be: 850 distance learners in 2003-04; 1,000 in 2004-05; 1,300 in 2005-06; 1,600 in 2006-07. This growth will occur in both e-learning and face-to-face (F2F) learning at remote sites.¹

The University will provide these distance learners with challenging, engaging, learner-centered opportunities that enhance their knowledge, critical thinking, creativity, and communication skills.

Rationale

Distance learning is important to UNCG for a number of reasons.

- By increasing learners' access to UNCG's intellectual resources, distance learning is an investment in the future of the people of North Carolina.
- Because of increasingly rapid changes in technology, economics, and demographics, Americans will need education throughout their lives simply to stay current in their

¹This document addresses only distance learning courses taken for credit. Throughout this document, "e-learning" refers to any type of totally electronic learning. Also note that not all electronic learning must be distance learning. For example, faculty members can put much of their materials online as a supplement to a traditional, on-campus course. Such Web-enhanced courses do not fall within the realm of this plan, which strictly concerns distance learning.

jobs; lifelong learning for busy adults can often best be provided via e-learning.

- E-learning can provide education “anytime, any place” and therefore serves place-bound individuals and accommodates the busy travel and work schedules of adult students.
- Well-designed distance learning has been documented to be comparable in student performance outcomes to traditional learning environments.
- Pedagogical innovations often result from converting F2F courses to online.
- Traditional on-campus students typically benefit when professors use portions of online courses in their on-campus courses.
- Because the University has limited space on campus for expansion, growth will eventually need to be largely through off-campus enrollments.
- Other universities such as East Carolina University, the University of Phoenix, DeVry University, Capella University, and Central Michigan University are aggressively marketing to students across North Carolina and are enrolling students who might otherwise take e-learning classes from UNCG. Students who once voted with their feet can now vote with their mouse.

This document is intended as a status report on distance learning at UNCG and a guide for developing new distance learning initiatives and services. The plan provides direction regarding (1) which programs should be encouraged to provide distance learning courses, (2) what incentives should exist for faculty to participate in distance learning, (3) what processes the University will use in the development of distance learning programs, and (4) how distance learners will be supported.

Status

Although UNCG is making strong institutional progress integrating instructional technology into face-to-face classes on campus, it is making only random progress in e-learning. There are pockets of e-learning activity and innovation, but for the most part the innovation is isolated and individual. In FY2002-03, only about 750 students registered at off-campus locations and through e-learning.

Most distance learning by UNCG faculty at present is F2F learning at remote sites. Faculty frequently drive to locations outside of Guilford County to provide on-site classes, including in Forsyth, Rockingham, Alamance, Randolph, Catawba, Buncombe, Mecklenburg, Rowan, Davidson, and Wake Counties. Because “windshield time” to remote locations is an inefficient use of faculty time, many of these classes could be converted, where academically appropriate, to electronic formats, either in part or in whole.

Several academic units, such as Special Education, the B-K program, the College, and Nursing, have committed to providing curricula to distant students and have developed expertise in designing and teaching online courses. Early adopters in some other departments have developed isolated Web-based courses, but many faculty express reluctance to develop e-learning courses, either because of pedagogical questions, intellectual property issues, workload issues, or concerns that electronic courses will eventually jeopardize faculty positions.

At present, UNCG offers via face-to-face instruction at off-site locations two certificates, four bachelor degree programs, ten Master's degree programs, and one Ed.D. program;² some of these programs are quite active, while others (especially M.Ed. programs) are offered irregularly. The University offers only two degree programs totally online, the M.S. in Nursing Education and the M.A. in Liberal Studies; it also offers online an add-on licensure in Special Education and a Post-Master's certificate in School Counseling. In fall 2004, the B.A. in Liberal Studies will be online.

UNCG has effectively implemented many instructional and support activities in distance learning, and these should be commended and continued. For example:

- Jackson Library provides a broad range of learning resources to all students, regardless of their location. For example, it provides numerous online resources that can be accessed remotely; it delivers other documents either electronically or in print; distance learners can request materials by filling out Web forms; there is an "ask a librarian" button on the library Web site; and toll-free telephone numbers are available to reach librarians. The library has even appointed a Coordinator of Library Services for Distance Education.
- The University has stipulated Blackboard as its primary courseware application, has invested in a site license for the application, and has hired a Blackboard Administrator; the Blackboard Enterprise System is fully integrated with SCT

²Approved off-site programs include:

B.S. in Business Administration/Business Studies (BUS)
 B.S. in Information Systems and Operations Management (ISM)
 B.S. in Pre-Elementary/Early Childhood/Kindergarten B-K Teacher Licensure (HDF)
 B.S.N. in Nursing (RN to BS) (NUR)
 M.S. in Nursing Education (NUR)
 M.Ed. in Special Education (SES)
 M.Ed. in Science Teacher Education (CUI)
 M.Ed. in Elementary Teacher Education (CUI)
 M.Ed. in Middle Grades Teacher Education (CUI)
 M.Ed. in Reading Teacher Education (CUI)
 M.Ed. in English as a Second Language Teacher Education (CUI)
 M.S.A. in Elementary, Middle, and Second Education Administration (ELC)
 M.L.I.S. in Library and Information Studies (LIS)
 M.A. in Liberal Studies (MLS)
 Ed.D. in Educational Leadership (ELC)
 Post-Master's Certificate in School Counseling (CED)
 Post-Baccalaureate Certificate in Non-Profit Management (PSC)

Banner, and Blackboard course shells are automatically created for all UNCG courses.

- The Teaching and Learning Center provides centralized training for faculty on how to use Blackboard and various applications.
- The Provost provides funding to programs that generate distance learning credits.
- Faculty have access to an interactive television studio that is expertly staffed.
- Early adopters within the faculty have experimented with and utilized distance learning applications and have demonstrated the effectiveness of distance learning. Faculty in such programs as SES, LIS, HDF, Nursing, MALS, and CUI have been offering courses at a distance using various media.
- IT has committed to 24/7 maintenance of Web servers and is training help desk personnel to assist distance learners.
- Enrollment Services has developed a Web registration system enabling all students to enroll in classes without coming to campus. UNCG's Virtual Information Station is a splendid, one-stop center at which all students can apply for admission, apply for financial aid, register for classes, activate computer accounts, pay bills, and check grades. Once distance learners receive their log-in and password information, they can conduct most business transactions via the Web.
- Forms and publications have almost all been placed online, such as the *Undergraduate Bulletin*, *Graduate Bulletin*, and application forms; degree audit checks are now automated via CAPP (Curriculum, Advising, and Program Planning).
- The Cashier's Office coordinated implementation of credit card and personal check processing via the Web.
- The Schools and College have Instructional Technology Consultants (ITCs) who assist faculty in developing online materials.
- DCL has established Web-authoring support teams to assist faculty in converting courses to the Web and has hired a Director of Online Learning to oversee teams.
- A new center, the Interdisciplinary Center for eLearning, provides research and discussion opportunities on the effectiveness of electronic learning.
- Five degree programs were launched as the UNCG Fusion Program in fall 2003, and many of those are significantly Web-enhanced classes.

- Enrollments in distance learning courses have risen dramatically in the past four years, as shown in the following chart.

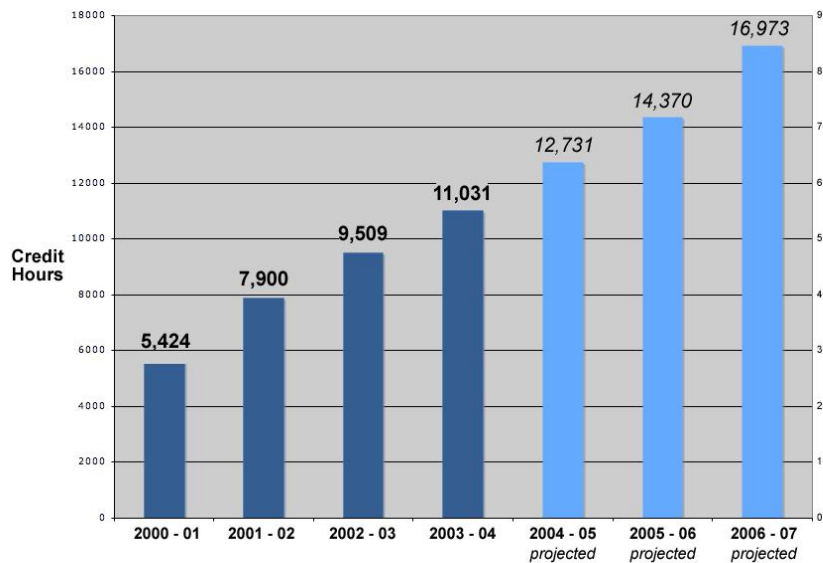


Figure 1. Distance Learning Credit Hour Production

The credit hours shown in Figure 1 include both types of distance learning: off-campus enrollments in face-to-face classes as well as online class registrations.

Many of the e-learning courses offered by UNCG are excellent, but others are highly textual, focus too much on the technology, and are basically static (i.e., little interactivity).

UNCG is at a crossroads in e-learning, and until priorities, processes, and incentives are articulated and implemented, mainstream faculty will likely remain reluctant to devote their time and energy to this type of instruction.

Trends in Higher Education

The future of higher education will likely be global, learner-centered, customized, highly competitive, outcomes-based, partially electronic, increasingly accessible, and perpetual.

More specifically:

- Non-traditional undergraduate students (25 and older) will soon become the majority, and part-time learners will increase.

- “Completion degrees” will be in demand by those learners who have prior college experience but did not graduate.
- Because of the quickening pace at which new knowledge will be created, employees will need to obtain ongoing education; as a result, certificate programs will likely be in high demand.
- More Americans than ever will return for graduate degrees.
- International students will access at least a portion (perhaps all) of their U.S. degree programs from their home countries via the Internet.
- For-profit institutions such as the University of Phoenix and Capella University will increasingly challenge public universities for adult learners.
- Home ownership of computers will continue to rise, allowing more adults to access online courses; at the last census (2000), 54 million U.S. households (51%) had one or more computers.
- High-speed connectivity is rapidly replacing dial-up service, allowing learners to access materials over 50 times faster on their home computers, and wireless technology will soon be pervasive.
- Better compression algorithms will allow graphics and videos in courses to pass through the Internet pipeline at faster speeds.

The plan outlined below takes into consideration these trends and predictions.

Principles

As UNCG increases its distance learning presence, it should endorse certain basic principles:

- Distance learning courses at UNCG must be at least of equal quality to traditional on-campus learning.
- Course content, learning activities, and good pedagogical practice should guide the choice of appropriate instructional technology.
- Permanent faculty and department heads must remain in control of curricula and course content.
- As with all instruction, the University expects permanent faculty to teach the majority of distance learning courses.

- Distance learning students must comply with all University standards and regulations.
- Distance learning students should receive services equal to those received by on-campus learners.
- Faculty should receive substantial support when developing and delivering e-learning courses.
- The development and teaching of distance learning courses must be recognized in the University's reward system, including the tenure and promotion process.

Strategies

To accomplish the target of enrolling 2,000 distance learners by 2008 and to fulfill the principles outlined above, UNCG will need strategies and action steps that ensure continued progress. If funded adequately and implemented effectively, the following strategies should help ensure that the University provides outstanding learning experiences to a broader constituency each year.

1. Focus on Learning, Not Technology

(Strategic Direction 1:4)

The quality of the educational experience for distant learners must be at least equal to the quality of the educational experience for on-campus students. To ensure that distance learning courses achieve excellence in design, communication, and assessment, UNCG should focus on the instructional design of courses, use the most appropriate technology, create a sense of community among learners, communicate expectations to students, and articulate instructors' responsibilities.

Focus on Instructional Design

The pedagogical features of technology are far more important than the technical features, which exist only to further pedagogy and learning.

The key to developing effective e-learning courses is instructional design—that is, developing instructional strategies, activities, and materials based on research and theory and designed to achieve specified goals, which are based on identified learning needs. Courses in which technology is simply bolted on to an existing F2F course will likely not achieve desired outcomes. An e-learning course can be designed to be as effective as a F2F course, but a butterfly is not created by pasting wings onto a caterpillar; instead, a clumsy caterpillar is created.

The best e-learning:

- Allows learners to interact with the content, the instructor, and other learners.
- Acknowledges the differences between e-learning and F2F learning and builds on those e-learning features that are advantages rather than trying try to replicate the F2F classroom.
- Matches the technology with the desired learning activities.
- Uses a variety of instructional techniques, such as case studies, simulations, narrated presentations, collaborative activities, and discussion.
- Promotes shared assignments and virtual teams of learners.
- Appeals to diverse learning styles.
- Accommodates learners with disabilities.

It is important to understand the profile of the adult learner in order to design learning experiences that meet their needs. According to research and surveys in adult education, the typical adult learner (defined as 25 years or older) is 42 years old, works full time, is married, and has two children; approximately sixty-five percent are female. Adult learners are typically highly motivated; are more self-directed than traditional learners; take greater responsibility for their own learning; usually bring with them rich experiences and prior knowledge that they want to be acknowledged and utilized; like to be involved in forming the learning objectives and co-construct learning activities; prefer problem-solving, hands-on, active learning experiences rather than lectures; are pragmatic and want to apply their knowledge immediately; like to relate new knowledge to prior knowledge and experiences; and like a mix of independent and collaborative learning activities.

This profile has definite implications for instructional strategies, with the emphasis being on learning-centered, dynamic, active experiences instead of presentational approaches. Methods preferred by adult learners include discussion groups, simulations, writing to learn, paired learning, group investigation, problem-based activities, constructive controversy, role playing, panel discussions, case studies, collaborative assignments, and dialogue with colleagues and with a facilitator of learning. What adult learners like least is the “talking head” approach.

Instructional design is also influenced by both the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Special attention should be paid to the construction of instructional materials that can easily be “viewed” by people using computer software and equipment such as screen readers, Braille output devices, or non-standard input devices. Designing for the divergent needs of special populations will increase the usability for everyone.

Give Consideration to New and Old Technologies

Numerous technologies are available for delivering courses at a distance, from low tech solutions such as audio tapes, email, and compact disks to high tech solutions like two-way videoconferencing, webcasting, and shared workspaces. There is often a tendency to adopt the latest technology that becomes available and discard earlier technologies, but no technology should be considered absolute, and no technology should be regarded obsolete. Availability should not equate to adoption of a technology.

When it comes to selecting instructional technology, the following guidelines are useful:

- Let the desired learning activities determine the choice of technology.
- Use the lowest technology that will achieve the goal.
- Use a combination of technologies, some synchronous, other asynchronous.
- Consider using CDs to deliver lengthy video until the bandwidth to homes increases significantly.

Foster Dialogue and a Sense of Community among Distance Learners

Perhaps the two greatest challenges of e-learning are creating a sense of community among participants and developing meaningful dialogue. Fostering a sense of community among distance learners is essential for several reasons: to promote cooperative learning, to encourage diverse perspectives in a course, to create dynamism through lively interchange, to keep students from feeling isolated, and to increase student retention within a program.

The essence of education is dialogue and reflection, and yet in many e-learning courses dialogue is less than ideal. Although dialogue is typically thought of as face-to-face discussion, technology has introduced other types of dialogue—the telephone, for instance—and the Internet specifically has given birth to such communication as email, chat rooms, asynchronous discussion boards, synchronous text messaging, listservs, bulletin boards, and audio chat. These technologies allow not only instructor-to-student communication, but also student-to-student dialogue.

When activities that encourage dialogue among students are incorporated into e-learning courses—shared projects, virtual teams, learning groups, collaborative problem-solving, debates, panel discussions, group assignments, breakout rooms with audio chat—the students become active learners, apply the concepts presented by the instructor, and learn from one another.

Communicate Expectations to Students

Students need to understand from the start what the University and the faculty expect of them. For example, they need to understand that the course they are taking is fully equivalent to an on-campus course and therefore they must be prepared to devote as much time and energy to reading, communication, and completion of assignments as in a traditional class. They must further understand that they must have a reliable access to

the Internet and be computer proficient, that much of the learning is self-directed, that they are expected to access the course Web site regularly for updates, that they must participate frequently in discussions, that it is their responsibility to contact the instructor with questions, that they are to work collaboratively on projects, and that they are to contribute resources that enrich the course. DCL is in the process of creating an online orientation for new e-learners that articulates expectations and requirements.

Articulate Instructor Responsibilities in e-Learning

As with any course, the instructor of an e-learning course must articulate clear learning objectives, create materials and activities that facilitate students' mastery of subject matter, sequence material logically, select media that suit the material, develop reinforcement activities, create a sense of community, and assess student learning. Once designed and developed, however, e-learning courses are not stand-alone devices that teach students.

Obviously, the core of any course is the instructor, who lectures, discusses, prompts, questions, guides, responds to, and tutors students. Although much of the instructor's content is placed on the Web in the form of narration, video, text, and graphics, the instructor's presence in a course must be consistent and evident. Timely responses to student questions and assignments are perhaps even more critical in e-learning than in traditional classes. Monitoring of distance learning students in fact needs to be more intrusive than in traditional courses to ensure that students are keeping up with the assignments, comprehending the materials, and staying intellectually engaged. Intrusive monitoring of students will improve both retention and performance.

2. Enhance Distance Learner Services

(Strategic Direction 1:8, 5:10)

Support for distant learners should be comparable in service and quality to that for on-campus learners. Distant learners need as much, if not more, help in accessing various services. Fortunately, many services at UNCG are relatively easy to access via distance, but other services need to be added or improved.

The office or division that provides services to on-campus students should be the same office or division that provides those services to distance learners. That is, the University should not create a new network of service offices specifically for distance learners.

Initial Information and Support

To demonstrate to prospective and new distance learners that UNCG is dedicated to meeting their needs, the University must make it clear from the beginning that it will provide first-rate academic and administrative support. E-learning students expect institutions to:

- Provide an orientation to the university.
- Explain (online) the general education requirements and degree requirements of their major.
- Explain what to expect in an online course.
- Provide a preliminary assessment tool to allow potential distance learners to determine whether this mode is a good fit for them.
- Inform students of the minimum technology skills they will need and the hardware and software required to take courses.
- Review transcripts of previous academic credit promptly and provide students with an assessment of what degree requirements have been satisfied.

Ongoing Academic Services

Once students begin taking e-learning courses, they expect the University to provide academic support services comparable to those provided to on-campus students. At present, however, certain services are available only to on-campus learners. For example, the University provides several academic support centers on campus—the Writing Center, the Speaking Center, the Learning Assistance Center—yet none of those services is currently offered to distance learners. It is possible for even writing services to be offered over the Internet; many universities have online writing laboratories (OWLs) to serve distance learners, and those services have proved to be effective.

Academic advising is not readily available to distance learners in most programs, though several programs provide excellent face-to-face advising at remote locations. Some universities have successfully used virtual advising for distance learners, and UNCG's Enrollment Services is in the process of developing such a system.

3. Provide Training and Staff Support for Faculty

(Strategic Direction 3.5)

Faculty who are developing and teaching e-learning courses require ready access to staff with expertise in instructional design, distance learning pedagogy, and instructional technology. Such support staff include Instructional Technology Consultants within academic divisions and the Teaching and Learning Center, Web teams in DCL, technical staff in ITP, and library staff.

Workshops for Faculty

In order for e-learning to become integrated into the culture of the institution, there must be more than early adopters and isolated pockets of innovation. To integrate technology into

teaching and achieve true transformation, a strong faculty development program must be in place that promotes comfort with and competency in e-learning.

Lifelong learning applies to everyone, including faculty. To further faculty expertise in e-learning, the University should continue to offer the Teaching and Learning Center's workshops in Blackboard, Dreamweaver, and new technologies as they are introduced. Training should also include instructional design principles and practice—e.g., how to reconceptualize F2F instruction into Web instruction and how to redesign content for online learning. In addition to face-to-face workshops, UNCG should provide online materials such as best practices in distance learning, reference materials on online pedagogy, copyright information, instructional design information, and course evaluation templates. The Teaching and Learning Center is in the process of putting some of these materials online.

Faculty development should be assessed not only by how many faculty members attend the sessions, but also by the impact on student learning.

Instructional Technology Consultants

One model of developing e-learning courses is to have faculty receive training in a courseware package, such as Blackboard, and then work with an Instructional Technology Consultant (ITC) to further develop their expertise. Each division has at least one Instructional Technology Consultant to help faculty integrate technology into their teaching, whether on campus or at a distance. The ITCs are valuable resources that have expertise in two primary areas: instructional technology and instructional design. The ITCs help faculty understand the options in distance learning, the pedagogy of e-learning, the process of developing e-learning materials, and the intricacies of the Blackboard courseware package. The main role of the ITC is that of trainer rather than implementer.

The advantages of this approach to online course development are that: faculty stay current with the technology; faculty can implement their instructional intentions precisely; no additional personnel are required beyond the ITCs; and the ITCs reside in the unit with their faculty and work closely with them. For faculty who enjoy learning technology and using instructional technology, this approach is excellent. The disadvantages of this approach are that faculty members must acquire substantial technological skill, faculty must spend considerable time doing lower order tasks, and the number of ITCs is quite small in relation to the number of faculty they serve.

To help ITCs continue to respond effectively to faculty requests in instructional design, ITCs deserve periodic training in emerging technologies and recent research in distance learning. It is incumbent on the Schools and College to provide ITCs with appropriate training opportunities. The ITC group has developed a comprehensive list of skills that every ITC should have, and that list can serve as an initial guide to training opportunities.

Online Development Teams

Some argue that requiring faculty to develop an entire distance learning course on their own is not an efficient use of faculty time. DCL therefore uses a team approach that provides faculty access to a group of experts: a project manager, graphic designer, instructional

designer, computer programmer, and editor. The faculty member, who is at the heart of the team, remains the content expert and architect of the course, but not the sole implementer.

The advantages of this approach are that it takes much of the workload off the faculty member; faculty who do not wish to learn elaborate technologies are not required to; and experts are used for various specialties. A team approach not only brings multiple perspectives and expertise to a course, but also takes much of the “grunt work” off faculty members, thereby allowing them to concentrate on pedagogy and content. In this model, non-faculty personnel provide much of the nuts-and-bolts work, including creation of graphics, shooting and editing video, computer programming, creation of animations, and proofreading. Many lower level tasks are done by student workers, such as inputting text, copying material, transferring files, and formatting text with html codes. The major disadvantages of the team approach are that faculty do not learn how to implement technological advances, the personnel costs are quite high, and revisions must typically be done by the production experts.

Because the team approach is expensive, it cannot be used for all course development. The Provost in consultation with the Deans Council will determine the programs that will have access to the DCL teams, which can create 22 online classes annually. Faculty who are developing e-learning courses not on this list will work directly with their designated ITC, and DCL will provide assistance through the ITC.

4. *Share Knowledge and Innovations*

(Strategic Direction 1:4)

Many e-learning materials and pedagogical practices have already been developed by UNCG faculty and staff. Examples of learning objects that have been created include interactive case studies, mini-lectures, narrated PowerPoint presentations, simulations, group exercises, audio files, video clips, lesson plans, graphics, animations, educational games, bibliographies, glossaries, equations, quizzes, tutorials, Java applications, templates, virtual tours, and expert interviews.

Despite the numerous learning objects being created on campus, too often the innovations remain with the individual faculty member or within an individual program. Our goal should be to spread knowledge and innovations across programs and across the institution. To provide the best learning experiences for students, to avoid duplication of effort, and to save time and resources, UNCG should develop activities and mechanisms for sharing knowledge, practices, and learning objects.

Examples of activities that are currently being done or that could be done to promote sharing of knowledge and innovations include:

- Summer institutes: in the same way that the Office of the Provost sponsors Blackboard workshops, it could sponsor a series of workshops that introduce mainstream faculty to the basics of e-learning, explore pedagogical and technological

issues, provide sample learning objects, and demonstrate best practices.

- Informal workshops: the Interdisciplinary Center for eLearning (ICE) holds “lunch-and-learn” events at which presenters demonstrate pedagogical and technical innovations.
- Departmental and discipline-specific workshops: early adopters in a department or discipline (e.g., social sciences) can hold informal seminars to demonstrate how they use e-learning to explain certain principles. Opportunities for interacting with other faculty working on similar instructional activities can create synergies, efficiencies, and collaborations that can result in enhanced student learning.
- Mentoring: some universities have established formal mentoring relationships between faculty experienced in e-learning and those less experienced, and they have found that early adopters transmit enthusiasm and credibility as well as knowledge.
- ITC interaction: the ITCs in various units could meet frequently to share ideas and information.
- Online teaching resources: the TLC’s web site offers materials and links to a vast array of online resources for instructors, including information on learning styles, active learning, mentoring, portfolios, assessment, and instructional research.
- Electronic newsletter: a quarterly communication that not only shares tips and techniques but also announces online news (emerging technologies, e-learning courses being developed, e-learning workshops and brown bag meetings) would keep faculty and staff informed of new developments in this area, as the Office of International Programs Center’s newsletter keeps everyone informed of its activities.
- Clearinghouse: UNCG could set up its own central repository of learning objects, to which faculty could contribute and other faculty could reconfigure and use in other courses; an area that is being set up in Oracle for ITCs could perhaps be expanded for this purpose.
- MERLOT: UNCG faculty can learn from and borrow from other faculty across the country through an organization called MERLOT (Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching); MERLOT (merlot.org) is a free Web-based collection of over 8,000 peer-reviewed, rated, easily retrievable, and reusable online materials created primarily by higher education faculty.

Although steps are being taken to spread the knowledge of early adopters, only a small percentage of faculty take part in the current efforts. UNCG needs to better leverage the knowledge and innovations of early adopters, share learning objects, and spread best practices.

5. Recognize and Compensate Faculty Contributions

(Strategic Direction 3:7)

For distance learning to compete with other activities for faculty time, faculty members must be recognized and compensated in meaningful ways for developing and teaching distance learning courses.

The University has multiple priorities—providing first-rate learning experiences for on-campus students, increasing external funding, increasing research and scholarship, increasing outreach activities, effecting technology transfer, increasing enrollments, and developing distance learning courses. In the scheme of things, many faculty view distance learning as a lower tier priority because they do not feel rewarded for the extra time and effort that goes into distance learning.

Faculty are compensated in several ways for their work: salary, tenure, promotion, merit raises, and workload assignment. The main faculty reward system in the University is tenure and promotion, and it is from the T&P documents that faculty understand the relative importance of various activities. This is not to say there are not inherent rewards in teaching online. Many faculty who teach online contend that it is as rewarding as—in some cases, more rewarding than—teaching face-to-face. But according to numerous reports, e-learning can be more time-consuming than F2F instruction.

For distance learning to be explicitly rewarded, the University might consider the following:

- Suggest that T&P documents at the department and school/college level explicitly recognize distance learning as an activity that requires special effort and creativity and design guidelines for developing and teaching distance courses.
- Reward innovation in the design of distance courses.
- Encourage faculty to conduct research on distance learning issues and publish scholarly articles and books on distance learning, which should count equally with other scholarship.
- Provide development stipends for faculty who create online courses.
- Share with faculty any revenue from licensing agreements of online courses or learning objects.

Although some universities adjust the workloads of faculty who develop and offer media-enhanced courses, this approach would be difficult to implement at UNCG because of increases in student enrollment.

What gets rewarded gets done. If UNCG is to achieve its goal of 2,000 distance learners by 2008, distance learning will need to be higher on the University's list of priorities and will need to be reflected in the University's system of rewards.

Additionally, faculty intellectual property rights must be protected. To ensure the rights of both faculty members and the University, there should be joint ownership (faculty member and University) of materials and courses developed for distance delivery.

6. *Integrate Distance Learning into Unit Plans*

(Strategic Direction 1:4)

To encourage departments to consider distance learning in their long-term planning, each School and the College can develop goals and action steps for participating in distance learning. Although not every degree program is a good candidate for distance learning, each department should assess the appropriateness of its programs for distance learning and communicate that assessment to its dean. Deans can then evaluate departments' recommendations and include as candidates those programs they deem to have a demonstrated demand, adequate faculty resources, and content appropriate for delivery at a distance.

Issues to consider in unit plans might include:

- Scheduling distance learning courses and teaching assignments at the same time that on-campus courses are scheduled.
- Scheduling e-learning courses with sufficient frequency to allow students to graduate in a timely manner.
- Scheduling support courses for other majors.
- Mentoring faculty new to e-learning.
- Using Teaching Assistants and adjunct instructors to assist in larger sections.
- Assigning one or more faculty members to create an e-learning course that other instructors would then teach.

It would be helpful if UNCG conducted an annual inventory of online courses. Such an inventory would list: all online credit courses taught by the University to distance learners; all on-campus credit courses whose content is at least fifty percent online; and all online non-credit courses taught by the University to distance learners. Knowing the University's inventory of online courses will give department heads, deans, and the Provost better information for strategic planning and will ensure better marketing of all courses.

7. Focus on Degrees and Certificates

(Strategic Direction 1:4, 1:11)

Because most distance learners want to obtain a degree or certificate instead of simply taking isolated courses, UNCG should concentrate its limited funds for distance learning on degrees and certificates. To determine which programs will be most needed in coming years, the University should utilize research into demographic trends, economic trends, and employment trends. Such research will help ensure that UNCG serves the needs of North Carolina's citizens and industry and provides instruction to a sufficiently large segment of the population to warrant the substantial investment required to develop distance learning courses.

Because the University has limited resources for developing distance learning programs, UNCG cannot provide support (e.g., faculty grants, technology, staff assistance) for all degree programs. The Provost in consultation with the Deans Council will therefore designate each year a limited number of programs to receive special assistance in online course development.

In determining which degree programs to develop online, the University should give priority to:

- Critical shortages: The Governor's Office and the UNC Office of the President identify occupations experiencing critical shortages, such as nursing and teaching. One way of responding to shortages could be by expanding access to these disciplines through e-learning.
- Niche degrees: Rather than developing distance learning degrees that many other universities have developed and thereby try to compete with the Dukes and Chapel Hills of the nation, it would be more effective for UNCG to focus on "niche" degrees that build on existing strengths. UNCG should not attempt to replicate all of its degree programs in an online environment. Instead, it should select programs that match the expertise of UNCG faculty with the emerging needs of learners, business, industry, and government in the State and nation.
- Interdisciplinary programs: Interdisciplinary degree programs are particularly attractive in e-learning not only because they incorporate analytic frameworks and information from different academic areas, but also because they distribute the development and teaching workload among several departments. Developing an entire Web-based degree is a daunting endeavor for a single department, but when that development is spread over several faculties, it is more feasible.
- Completion degree programs: Because the national graduation rate for college students is only around 50%, a huge market exists for degree programs that concentrate on the final two years of a degree.
- Graduate degree programs: Increasingly, a graduate degree is viewed as a necessity for certain professions and for advancement in many organizations. A large number

of individuals desiring a graduate degree are professionals who cannot interrupt their careers to take classes full time and who prefer the convenience of e-learning. Master's degree programs typically require only ten to twelve courses, and many of these programs may be good candidates for distance learning.

- New degree programs: As academic units develop new degree programs, consideration should be given to the appropriateness of developing those programs in an e-learning format from the very beginning. Conceptualizing a program as a distance offering often will be easier than converting it from a face-to-face to a distance learning mode. Examples of new degree programs that might be developed at UNCG include journalism and entrepreneurship.
- Certificate programs: Certificates are popular at many universities across the country because they provide specialized learning in an abbreviated fashion. UNCG already offers many certificates on campus, especially post-baccalaureate certificates, including ones in non-profit management, gerontology, museum studies, geographic information systems, and technical writing. Offering certificate programs via distance learning would be attractive to many working adults who would like additional expertise and credentials but are hesitant to sign on for a full graduate degree.

Examples of programs that might be considered good candidates for e-learning at UNCG are:

- B.S. in Communication Sciences and Disorders
- B.A. in Hospitality Management
- B.S. in Public Health Education
- M.M. in Music Education
- M.A. in Speech Pathology and Audiology
- M.A. in Conflict Resolution
- M.S. in Genetic Counseling
- Master of Public Health Education
- Ed.D. in Exercise and Sport Science
- Alternative Licensure Program in Teacher Education
- Certificate in Non-Profit Management
- Certificate in Conflict Resolution

Even if a School or the College does not offer a degree program at a distance, individual courses from departments may be needed to support a distance learning degree in another School. It is desirable for those distance learning support courses to be offered by UNCG departments, but if faculty elect not to provide e-learning support courses, students will have to be directed to distance learning courses at other colleges and universities.

8. Target Specific Populations

(Strategic Direction 4:3, 4:8, 4:9, 5:2, 5:9)

Distance learning should primarily target those students who, for whatever reason, find it difficult or impossible to attend courses on campus.

- Working adults in particular can benefit from distance learning because their busy schedules often make it difficult to attend face-to-face courses on campus. In addition, intellectually mature learners typically perform better than others in distance learning environments. Distance learning requires self-motivation and self-discipline because it is incumbent on the student to access materials, enter online discussions, conduct independent research, and read class materials.
- The Armed Forces increasingly are seeking distance learning for soldiers; because of the number of military personnel stationed in North Carolina, UNCG and other universities within the UNC system can play an important role in educating these adult learners.
- Because the Internet is a global network, English speakers in such far-away places as New Zealand, India, Hong Kong, Denmark, Chile, Ireland, Israel, South Korea, and Zambia will be capable of receiving UNCG courses. The University should prepare to accommodate the needs of these international students by ensuring that web sites are culturally sensitive and by providing help desk hours to accommodate students in different time zones.
- The senior year of high school is considered highly unproductive by many observers. Talented seniors who have the motivation, intellectual maturity, and perseverance can benefit from taking either F2F on-site courses from UNCG (through the Fast Forward Program) or online courses. By providing college-level courses to these students, UNCG provides students with intellectually challenging material, and the students enter college the next year with as much as a semester of coursework already earned.

Whether UNCG on-campus students should be permitted to take distance learning courses is an issue frequently raised by faculty and administrators. The concern is that students will take e-learning classes instead of taking F2F on-campus classes. If distance learning is intended to reach new students, what is gained by having existing on-campus students take those classes? In reality, there is no way to prohibit these students from taking an e-learning class, but there is a disincentive to full-time on-campus students: according to current policy, they must pay additional tuition if they take an e-learning class. On the other hand, an argument for allowing students to take an e-learning class is that in some instances students will take one more class than usual if that class is online, thus accelerating their progress toward a degree. Some universities are in fact requiring on-campus students to take at least one online course to enhance their computer literacy. Still, UNCG on-campus students are not the primary audience for our classes.

9. Offer Non-Traditional Schedules

(Strategic Direction 5:9)

The emphasis on adult learners in distance learning suggests that non-traditional schedules and formats should be explored, including accelerated 5-week, 8-week and 10-week classes, intersession courses, and F2F weekend offerings at remote sites. Because most adult learners work full-time and many travel as part of their jobs, attending a traditional, 15-week F2F remote class is often difficult. UNCG offers a few accelerated classes, but not as consistently as universities and colleges in the Triad that target adult learners, such as High Point University, Greensboro College, and Guilford College. Surveys indicate that most adult learners prefer not to be away from their families more than one evening per week, and therefore a blended model (some F2F, some Web-based) is particularly attractive to them. Face-to-face or blended courses that meet for 8 weeks could allow particularly energetic adult learners to take two classes per 8-week session during a semester timeframe and thereby qualify for financial aid as full-time students.

If non-traditional schedules are to be pursued, certain administrative functions will need to develop procedures that accommodate faculty and students' needs for flexible scheduling. For example, the University's registration system must allow a larger number of course start and ending dates for non-traditional formats; administrative software should not dictate academic schedules.

The call for more flexibility in scheduling is not limited to a few faculty at UNCG. President Molly Broad co-authored a 2003 report entitled *Building A Nation of Learners* that cites "the need for more digital campuses, online services, and flexible semesters." The report urges universities to "experiment with the traditional academic calendar and style of delivery" as part of a redesign of higher education (p. 17).

10. Continue to Update Technology and Infrastructure

(Strategic Direction 1:4, 1:8)

Because new technologies that have educational applications are developed almost every month, it is impossible to predict what technologies will be developed in the next five years. Suffice it to say that in the coming years, UNCG must continue to keep abreast of new technologies, determine which ones can be used to enhance student learning, and select those commercial applications that combine excellence and affordability. Once technologies are acquired, they must be maintained, and faculty and students using those technologies must be supported with excellent service.

Technical Support for Faculty

Faculty rightly expect fast Internet connections, uninterrupted access to their online course materials, up-to-date hardware and software, expert technical advice, reliable and prompt technical support for their students, adequate storage space for their course materials, and servers that are secure. In short, they want technology that works. Furthermore, they expect

ITP staff to evaluate new applications, learn how to quickly install and effectively maintain new hardware and software, ensure interoperability among systems, and provide faculty with troubleshooting help. Each year, as new and better means of delivering online courses are created—streaming video, audio chat software, electronic portfolios, etc.—ITP staff respond by learning those improvements and adding them to their existing responsibilities.

Technical Support for Students

Because e-learners access instructional materials at all hours, students expect content to be accessible at all times and technical help to be available when they experience problems. To accommodate distance learners, ITP must:

- Ensure 24/7 maintenance of servers.
- Have redundant systems so that Web-based courses are operational 24/7/365 (and network equipment is not totally shut down when maintenance is performed).
- Provide extended hours of help desks—eventually 24/7/365 service—and establish toll-free numbers for students to call.
- Train help desk staff to respond to distance learners' needs.

Like other students, distance learners can call 6-TECH (256-8324) when they have technical questions.

Resources Needed

As more faculty place courses online, and as more students enroll for those courses, the demands on ITP staff increase proportionately. It is unreasonable to expect ITP to take on new and larger responsibilities without increasing its personnel or other-than-personnel allocations. If ITP is to accommodate faculty needs, it will need additional staff and additional funding for infrastructure and hardware, especially for servers. Funding must be allocated for staff support, new technologies, equipment replacement, network expenses, and ITP operating expenses.

Better Communication

It is critical that faculty and staff outside of ITP communicate with ITP before purchasing new software or proposing to add or expand facilities. Only when ITP staff are informed in advance of new needs or equipment can they ensure compatibility of products and make the preparations necessary to install software and hardware.

Communicating needs and expectations applies not only to distance learning activities, but also to face-to-face instruction at remote sites. Whenever any unit proposes to offer courses at a remote site, it should give participating faculty the opportunity to explore that site to ensure that it meets instructional needs. Faculty need to ensure that the facility's room size, computing equipment, projection equipment, lighting, and network connection will meet their instructional needs.

Evaluation of Technical Support

To determine the effectiveness of IT support, UNCG should develop assessment criteria for technical support and conduct annual surveys of faculty and student satisfaction.

11. Establish a Distance Learning Committee

(Strategic Direction 1:4, 5:7, 5:8, 5:10)

At present, no single committee is charged with addressing distance learning issues. As a result, issues tend to be addressed in an ad hoc manner, and several committees address isolated issues as they arise (e.g., Academic Computing Committee, Enrollment Management Committee, University Teaching and Learning Center Committee, and Cancellation and Reinstatement Committee). Furthermore, communication occasionally is inadequate among offices and personnel involved in delivering distance learning courses and services.

If relevant offices had representatives on a distance learning committee, all parties could provide their perspective as issues arise. It is essential that all parties stay informed of distance learning plans and initiatives because distance learning initiatives affect personnel and offices across and beyond campus. For personnel in ITP, Admissions, Registrations, Financial Aid, Student Academic Services, the Office of the Provost, deans' offices, departments, DCL, and others to provide excellent support for distance learning programs, they must be made aware of and prepare for changes and new projects. Any time a unit is considering offering a new distance learning initiative, it could communicate with all potentially affected offices through a new Distance Learning Committee. Likewise, any administrative office contemplating a system change that could affect distance learning units could communicate with those units. By bringing together talent from across the University to address distance learning issues, UNCG will be able to deliver better courses and better services to students.

Distance learning is a collaborative endeavor that requires input and assistance from a variety of offices and personnel, but overall responsibility and administration of distance learning at UNCG resides with the Office of the Provost. The Provost, the deans of individual Schools and the College, and the heads of individual departments and programs—in collaboration with faculty within each program—are instrumental in deciding which programs to offer at a distance. The faculty of each program will continue to formulate curriculum and ensure the integrity of course content; control of and integrity of the content is indisputably the province of the faculty. The Distance Learning Committee will not usurp the authority of existing committees, such as curriculum committees and enrollment services committees. Rather, it will help identify emerging issues, make suggestions regarding policy, and coordinate with existing committees.

12. Market All e-Learning under “UNCG iCampus”

(Strategic Direction 5:7)

Marketing of distance learning programs should be centralized so that all degree programs and courses will be included in marketing materials. Centralized marketing will be primarily the responsibility of the Division of Continual Learning, which will use “UNCG iCampus” as an umbrella marketing name. Distance learning will also be promoted by University Relations in its print and electronic publications. Individual departments and schools are also at liberty, of course, to market their programs to targeted learners, such as nurses, teachers, and social workers.

One of the most effective marketing tools is the UNCG Web site. Students seeking online degrees typically visit several universities’ sites before selecting a program. As they review sites, they look to see if a university offers all required information and services online (or via the phone). Specifically, they expect:

- A central portal for e-learning that is prominently displayed on the University’s main web site so distance learners are not required to navigate through a maze of pages unrelated to their needs; at present, there is no direct link on the UNCG main web site for distance learners.
- The look of a virtual campus from which they can apply for admission, register for classes, learn about and apply for financial aid, access library resources, and obtain academic advising.
- A centralized office that can respond to general questions person-to-person and can refer distance learners to appropriate program directors for degree-specific courses; that office should be the Division of Continual Learning.
- A list of distance degree programs and degree requirements for those programs.
- Samples of online courses so they can preview one module of a course to determine the content and quality; the Division of Continual Learning should be responsible for this task.

13. Reduce Costs of e-Learning, Increase Funding

(Strategic Direction 1:4, 2:5, 4:1)

To better understand the return on UNCG’s financial investment in e-learning, the University should attempt to compare the costs per credit hour of e-learning courses to those of on-campus courses. Even if e-learning costs are similar to on-campus costs, the University should explore ways of reducing expenses and of increasing funding.

Following are options for reducing costs.

- Reuse materials. As stated previously, sharing learning objects is efficient and cost-effective. Once learning objects have been designed and programmed, they often can be reused through minor reconfiguring and repurposing in other courses.
- Hire experienced faculty. Increasingly, the pool of candidates for faculty positions contains candidates who have experience designing, developing, and teaching online courses. Since hiring a professor with e-learning experience decreases training expenses and increases the knowledge pool about e-learning, departments may wish to consider such experience in hiring decisions.
- Define resource requirements for courses. It is possible to differentiate online courses by the amount of time and funding required to produce a first-rate course. Some e-learning courses can be effective without a large time investment in computer programming and splashy visuals. Other courses may require a larger investment of resources to sufficiently enrich the student learning experience. UNCG should attempt to define several types of online efforts—e.g., high, medium, low—and use those definitions for allocating resources. (It is important to understand that the definitions refer not to the effectiveness of the courses but to the amount of resources needed to achieve effectiveness.)
- Collaborate on marketing. Marketing e-learning courses is expensive because they are intended to reach beyond the local geographic area of the Triad, and running newspaper and cable television ads across the state becomes prohibitive. If UNCG could collaborate on marketing campaigns with one or more other colleges in the state, costs could be significantly reduced.
- Buy materials or entire courses. Universities across the country are developing many of the same courses, often nearly identical in structure and content, that UNCG is considering putting online. Instead of funding the development of these courses, the University could explore purchasing either an entire course or portions of courses.
- Explore alternative staffing models. The initial investment to develop an online course can be quite high, but once the course is developed, it can be offered to large numbers of students during a semester. Rather than having multiple sections of the same course, each with a separate instructor, distance learning courses allow a pyramidal staffing configuration to help recoup development costs. For example, instead of having five sections of a single course, each with a different instructor and twenty-five students, a program could offer a single section of 125 students, led by a professor who is assisted by two lecturers and three teaching assistants. The lead instructor designs the course and therefore is at the heart of the instruction, but responding to student emails and evaluating student essays and exams can often be done by assisting instructors.

Potential methods of increasing funding for e-learning include:

- Lobby to increase fees. At present, on-campus learners pay more per course than distance learners—not in tuition, but in fees. Certain fees (student activity fee, athletic fee, student facility fee, and health service fee) are not assessed for distance learners because distance learners do not use those services. As a result, the overall price of a distance learning course is less than an on-campus course. Since the cost of developing and delivering a distance learning course is actually more than the cost of developing and delivering an on-campus course, the price of distance learning courses should reflect these higher development and delivery costs. It is therefore recommended that UNCG explore the feasibility of requesting approval from the Board of Governors to charge academic fees specific to distance learning. The goal would be to make the price assessed for distance learning courses more reflective of the true costs of providing the courses.
- Seek external funding. Grant programs to develop e-learning programs are offered both by governmental agencies and private foundations. Federal agencies that have a history of funding distance learning include the U.S. Department of Education, the National Science Foundation, NASA, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration. Private foundations that fund distance learning projects include the Sloan Foundation, AT&T Foundation, Time Warner Cable, Hewlett-Packard, Pew Charitable Trusts, Mott Foundation, Ameritech Foundation, Kellogg Foundation, Microsoft Corporation, and scores of others listed in *The Distance Learning Sourcebook* by Arlene Krebs.
- Request equipment and service gifts from firms. In addition to seeking funding for e-learning projects, the University should seek donations in the form of hardware, software, services, and advertising. For example, several computer firms (IBM, Toshiba, Hitachi, Microsoft, Intel, Hewlett-Packard) have generous equipment donation programs for institutions of higher learning. Likewise, free air time from media firms would help keep down marketing costs.
- Put large enrollment courses online. Although the general rule should be to focus e-learning efforts on programs rather than individual courses, exceptions might be made to this rule for large enrollment courses. A number of universities, including Penn State and Virginia Tech, have had success developing online versions of large enrollment, general education courses. The Teaching and Learning Center is currently seeking funding to put components of large enrollment courses online.
- License courses or parts of courses. Another potential source of funding for distance learning is second usage of materials. For example, courses or parts of courses can be licensed or sold outright to other institutions; some colleges, such as the Dallas County Community College District, raise significant funds from leasing their courses to other colleges. In such cases, both the University and the

faculty developer(s) should share in the receipts. Another type of second usage is bundling portions of courses (e.g., study guides, pre-tests, games, mini-lectures, videos) in textbooks. Publishers frequently include CDs with textbooks and pay for multimedia materials in those CDs. Again, revenue should be shared by both the University and the developer(s). Finally, academic course materials can be condensed and used as professional development modules by professional associations and societies. For instance, e-learning materials from a Communication Sciences and Disorders course can be reused as a continuing education course for speech pathologists who need continuing education units for recertification.

14. Promote Collaborations and Partnerships

(Strategic Direction 4:1, 4:9, 5:1, 5:2, 5:9)

Developing an entire e-learning degree program can be a daunting and time-consuming endeavor, and often times there are faculty in other UNC institutions who have an interest in putting similar material online. To avoid duplication within the State and to save resources, UNCG should entertain partnering with other UNC institutions, with community colleges, and with virtual consortia, such as the Southern Regional Electronic Campus. Other advantages of collaboration are the broader marketing that a consortium can achieve and the ability to offer highly specialized courses that may have insufficient enrollment at one institution but could draw a larger enrollment from a wide region.

An example of one inter-institutional collaboration in the recent past is the M.A. in Speech Pathology and Audiology through the North Carolina Consortium. Other collaborations planned or underway are the Bachelor of Liberal Studies program, in which NC State and UNCG will offer tracks within similar degree programs; HES's proposed M.S. in Family Community Studies with NC State; and the College's proposed B.A. in Geomatics with NC A&T. Other programs for which there may be opportunities to collaborate include international studies, entrepreneurship, conflict resolution, and genetic counseling. UNCG's new Blackboard Content System, funded by the Office of the President, should facilitate collaboration on course development among UNC institutions.

UNCG should also encourage the Office of the President to develop other types of system-wide cooperation and collaboration. For example, instead of each campus creating its own faculty development programs for distance learning, OP could develop a central model as the state of Maryland has done. Other opportunities for collaboration within the UNC system include sharing online materials among institutions and centralized marketing of programs, especially to the military.

Overseas Partnerships

UNCG might also consider pursuing partnerships with overseas institutions. These partnerships could take various forms: UNCG could lease online courses to overseas universities; establish 2 + 2 programs whereby students take the first two years of instruction from their home institution and the final two years online from UNCG; or a 2 + 2

arrangement where overseas students take online courses in their junior year from UNCG and then come to Greensboro for their final year on the UNCG campus.

UNCG Fulbright Scholars are a good source for making connections with overseas universities. In addition, academic units could contact international individuals who received their doctorates from the UNC system and returned to their homeland; these graduates could be contacts between their university and UNCG. These individuals could also become adjunct faculty and teach online courses. Recruiting a few highly qualified faculty from overseas institutions as adjunct faculty in selected e-learning courses, especially faculty who earned a degree from a U.S. institution, would be one way to help internationalize UNCG's instruction. An example of a university that successfully uses overseas faculty in online courses is Fairleigh Dickinson University; as a result of using overseas faculty, it also enrolls overseas students in many of its online programs.

In courses or even programs that have an international focus, such as comparative politics or international finance, partnering with an overseas university could have many benefits. San Jose State University, for example, uses videoconferencing to deliver an international relations course both to on-campus students and to students at the Moscow Institute of International Relations. Students on both sides are exposed to perspectives very different from their own and are challenged to articulate and sometimes reconsider their views.

Corporate Partnerships

UNCG should foster relationships with corporations with large workforces in the Triad and offer to provide degree programs to their employees either on-site or via videoconferencing. For a reasonable price, corporations can install a wireless videoconferencing classroom that can also serve their in-house training needs. UNCG faculty can teach an on-campus class in McNutt and simultaneously a class at a corporate site using two-way interactive videoconferencing. The Bryan MBA Program would be a strong candidate for such delivery, as would the R.N. to B.S. in Nursing delivered to hospitals. In many corporations, employees are permitted to take an extended lunch break in order to take job-related classes delivered over the noon hour (when the McNutt Teleconference Center is usually not used).

15. Utilize e-Learning Materials in Traditional Classes

(Strategic Direction 1:4)

Although this document focuses on distance learning, “blended courses”—those that combine face-to-face instruction and online coursework—can be developed separately from distance learning courses. Often, these are a first step toward a fully online course.

In addition, the materials developed for distance learning courses can be used as supplemental instruction for on-campus students. Allowing on-campus students to access online materials originally developed for off-campus students can extend the learning experience of on-campus students beyond the face-to-face meetings and can result in enhanced student performance.

A faculty member may wish to develop a fully online course exclusively for use on campus. For example, an instructor could provide all lectures online in the form of narrated PowerPoint slides with accompanying video, animation, graphics, and text—and require students to view those lectures online before coming to the F2F class. The class time would therefore be improved enormously because students can discuss ideas from the lectures, debate issues, spend more time in labs, or work on group assignments. This model radically transforms the classroom experience from passive note-taking to active learning.

16. Assess Programs and Outcomes

(Strategic Direction 1:7)

To ensure that distance learning courses provide the same level of quality as on-campus courses, course assessments should be done on each course. Methods of assessing quality include end-of-course student surveys that cover learning outcomes, satisfaction with technology and design, and satisfaction with student services (admissions, registrations, library, bookstore, bursar); analysis of data on student retention and performance; comparison of grades of online and on-campus students in the same course; electronic portfolios; and peer evaluation of teaching.

A more in-depth assessment would be for faculty interested in instructional research to conduct research projects on online learning. Having empirical data on the effectiveness of online techniques, tools, and pedagogies will help improve online learning and will add credibility to online teaching.

Conclusion

The goal of UNCG's distance learning programs is to allow all qualified learners to attain a higher level of education in order to enrich their lives, increase their skills, and improve their economic and social well being. Distance learning will play a major role at UNCG in the next decade by extending the intellectual resources of the University, providing learners with easier access to those resources, and contributing to the economic development of the Triad and the State. According to the Milken Institute, "the single factor with the greatest power to explain differences in per capita income between states is the percentage of college graduates. On average, a one-year increase in a metropolitan area's educational level raises wages by 3 to 5 percent."³

A successful distance learning program requires not only a strategic plan, but also high-level administrative commitment, adequate funding, faculty buy-in, an understanding of online pedagogy, and support for students and faculty. The absence of any of these factors can limit the success of the University's distance learning efforts.

³Ross Devol, "Institute View," *The Milken Review*, first quarter 2002, p. 90.