CUNY Online Task Force
Report & Recommendations
Fall 2016

Chairs
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Participants
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Introduction

In fall 2016, Chancellor Milliken convened a task force of CUNY presidents, chaired by
Ann Kirschner and Jeremy Travis, to discuss the status, present and future, of online
education at CUNY. The group met four times between September and November, 2016.

The work and recommendations of the task force are a practical extension of the CUNY
Strategic Framework, which calls upon the university to strengthen services to our core
constituency, extend our reach, and heighten our public profile. CUNY currently lacks an
integrated approach to offering online programs, and needs to expand our overall
offerings to meet student needs and to remain competitive with other large university
systems. Chancellor Milliken brought together the task force to take advantage of the
opportunity this also represents: a chance to think deeply about the role of online
education at CUNY, use it to promote best pedagogical practices, raise CUNY's profile,
and develop a united approach to vetting, supporting, and branding online programs. The
group saw this as a unique opportunity to plan for future needs, when online and face-to-
face instruction will merge into numerous hybrid opportunities for our students.

At our first meeting, the Chancellor noted the strong alignment between the CUNY
mission and the power of online education – to enhance access for those who otherwise
could not get an education; to increase academic momentum and progress to degree for
students already enrolled; to encourage our faculty to engage in the most effective
pedagogy; to facilitate cross-pollination across our campuses; to grow enrollment in a
time of revenue shortages; to build platforms that will expand our reach beyond the city
boundaries to the rest of the world. The Chancellor also asked us to complete our work
by the end of the semester and to focus on the key policy choices facing CUNY rather
than implementation details. The task force identified key investment needs (both
monetary and infrastructural) as well as existing obstacles. In most cases, the focus was
on naming issues rather than solving them, with the understanding that targeted groups of
experts at CUNY will be tasked with proposing specific practical solutions in the
upcoming months.

With the help of George Otte, the group also engaged in an environmental scan, examining existing models for online education at large institutions. These approaches included at one extreme, a central online "campus" serving the whole university, and at the other extreme, individual campus control over all online education functions, with no support from the central administration.

The Task Force recommends the adoption of a middle path: a shared services approach that allows cross-campus collaboration, common platform, marketing, and agreed-to standards for instructional quality and branding, with central support rather than control. Central to this model and its sustainability, we propose the creation of an in-house CUNY Online Accelerator that will work to foster programs alongside vendor-aided program development. It is imperative that CUNY develop a strong and specific branding identity (e.g., CUNY Online at Campus) and instructional quality standards for CUNY Online, and that work done under that umbrella adhere to a unified set of standards regardless of what path is taken to develop the program. We believe this approach will leverage current strengths, and will allow CUNY to leapfrog to a leadership position in online education.

Core Principles and Recommendations

1. Develop a coordinated approach that maximizes CUNY and campus branding to build enrollment and enhance student access while cultivating common policies and practice for branding, recruitment, technology use, IP policies, and quality assurance.

2. Focus coordination strategically, on programs rather than courses, allowing these to "bubble up" from the campuses and follow established review processes, while making those review processes sensitive to the goals of growing online programs, including review for market viability, fiscal viability, and differentiation

3. Have CUNY's Office of Academic Affairs take an active leadership role in cultivating new online programs, communicating priorities (especially those that promise growth in access and student success), looking for synergistic intercampus opportunities, and overseeing quality control. The major role of OAA is to foster new growth and programs, not to constrain campus efforts.

4. Use schools at an advanced stage of online readiness as prototyping test cases for branding and marketing strategy

5. Promulgate practices and models that encourage collaboration between campuses

6. Create an in-house CUNY Online Accelerator to build capacity for program development

7. Ease the path for students and faculty
    a. Use global search to make it easy to find and identify online courses
    b. Use a common LMS platform
    c. Simplify e-permit and registration
    d. Provide excellent technical/help desk support
    e. Negotiate effective workload, IP, and faculty incentive models for online course/program creation

CUNY's ultimate goal for online education is provide more degrees, greater access, and better pedagogy and learning outcomes. To do this, we need centralized support for decentralized capacity, and truly shared services.

Tracks to Online Development

The task force proposes three tracks for developing new, approved online programs. These are not mutually exclusive; program developers may take an à la carte approach to meet their needs. **In all cases, the campus will adhere to common standards for online courses in branding, technology, IP agreements, financial models, and quality assurance. These standards will be outlined in detail in an RFP that is being developed presently. The Task Force will meet again to review the RFP and make more specific recommendations for the building institutional capacity through in-house work proposed below.**

1. Campus-based development for campuses that have the capacity to produce their own program

2. Work with a vendor/online service provider to develop a program (draft RFP expected early in 2017)

3. Development facilitated by CUNY's proposed in-house accelerator for online program development (including project management, instructional design support, faculty development, quality review, and business modeling.

Requirements for Success (Responsible parties noted in parentheses)

The task force took note of important areas for future consideration, recognizing that some university functions must be re-engineered to support online programs.

*   Efficient growth of online programs at CUNY will require retooling some existing processes that affect multiple constituencies at the university. (Academic Affairs, IT)

*   Collaboration at campuses must be not only accepted but actively encouraged and rewarded. (Academic Council)

- Processes must be easy for faculty and students, providing adequate instructional and technical support including advising and orientation for students as well as faculty development, and ease of registration and credit transfer. (Academic Affairs, Registrar, IT, Finance)

- Incentives for faculty need to include considerations for workload and compensation. (General Counsel, Academic Affairs, Labor Relations)

- IP policies for online course building will require careful attention, coordination, and communication. (General Counsel and Academic Affairs)

- The proposed CUNY Online Accelerator for online program development will require a focused effort to define, fund, and launch.