



Strategic Plan for Distance Education

September, 2016

Southeastern's Distance Education Strategic Plan Task Force (see Appendix A for a list of committee members) was charged with proposing a strategic plan for guiding the offering of particular degree programs in distance formats based on *student* needs and demand, and taking into account factors such as:

- resource issues
- faculty and student support required for such programming
- means for ensuring program quality
- marketing issues
- operational and organizational issues
- relevant University policies
- relevant SACSCOC standards and requirements

A diagram of the relevant factors is included in Appendix B.


Planning Environment

Committee members discussed distance education in general, and at Southeastern in particular. We also reviewed distance education strategic plans from other universities.

The committee's list of desired future states appears in Appendix C. An enumeration of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats relevant to a strategic plan for distance education appears in Appendix D.

Strategic Priorities

The following four strategic priorities were identified:



Resources and
Support



Instructional
Design



Compliance
and Evaluation



Marketing

Strategic Priority 1: Resources and Support
Provide needed resources and support for distance education

Action Items

- Create a stand-alone unit in charge of distance education
 - Recruit and hire a full-time, dedicated director for the unit
 - Provide a quality platform for delivery
 - Create and maintain a Distance Learning web page
- Provide resources and support for students and faculty
 - Provide enhanced technological resources and technology support
 - Provide funds for training
 - Provide reassign time for course development
- Incorporate benchmarks in faculty evaluation guidelines to promote innovative teaching and impact using distance education methodologies

Strategic Priority 2: Instructional Design
Coordinate planning, developing, and delivering distance education courses

Action Items

- Coordinate instructional design inputs
 - Best practices
 - Course templates
 - Training and other professional development for faculty in design and delivery
 - Conduct surveys to assess need and interest
 - Instructional design support
- Provide quality assurance process for distance education courses
 - Revamp Quality Matters at Southeastern
 - Revamp approval process for distance education courses

Strategic Priority 3: Compliance and Evaluation
Determine actual and desired distance education presence and provide for course evaluation

Action Items

- Develop an accurate inventory of existing and desired distance education courses
 - Determine exactly what distance education offerings we currently have
 - Assess online percentage in each degree program, and submit to Board of Regents/SACSCOC for approval as required if indicated
 - Assess the need for additional distance education programs or courses
- Evaluate distance education courses
 - Create a clear, easy to implement policy for evaluation of all distance education methodologies
 - Include student surveys as an aspect of course evaluation

Strategic Priority 4: Marketing
Promote and reinforce distance education offerings

Action Items

- Market distance education programs/courses
 - Identify courses on articulation matrix that are offered via distance education and explore opportunities for cross-enrollment
 - Target promotions to appropriate audiences
 - Use Southeastern Channel as much as possible
- Reinforce successful distance education offerings
 - Seek recognition for distance education degree programs and courses
 - Celebrate successes

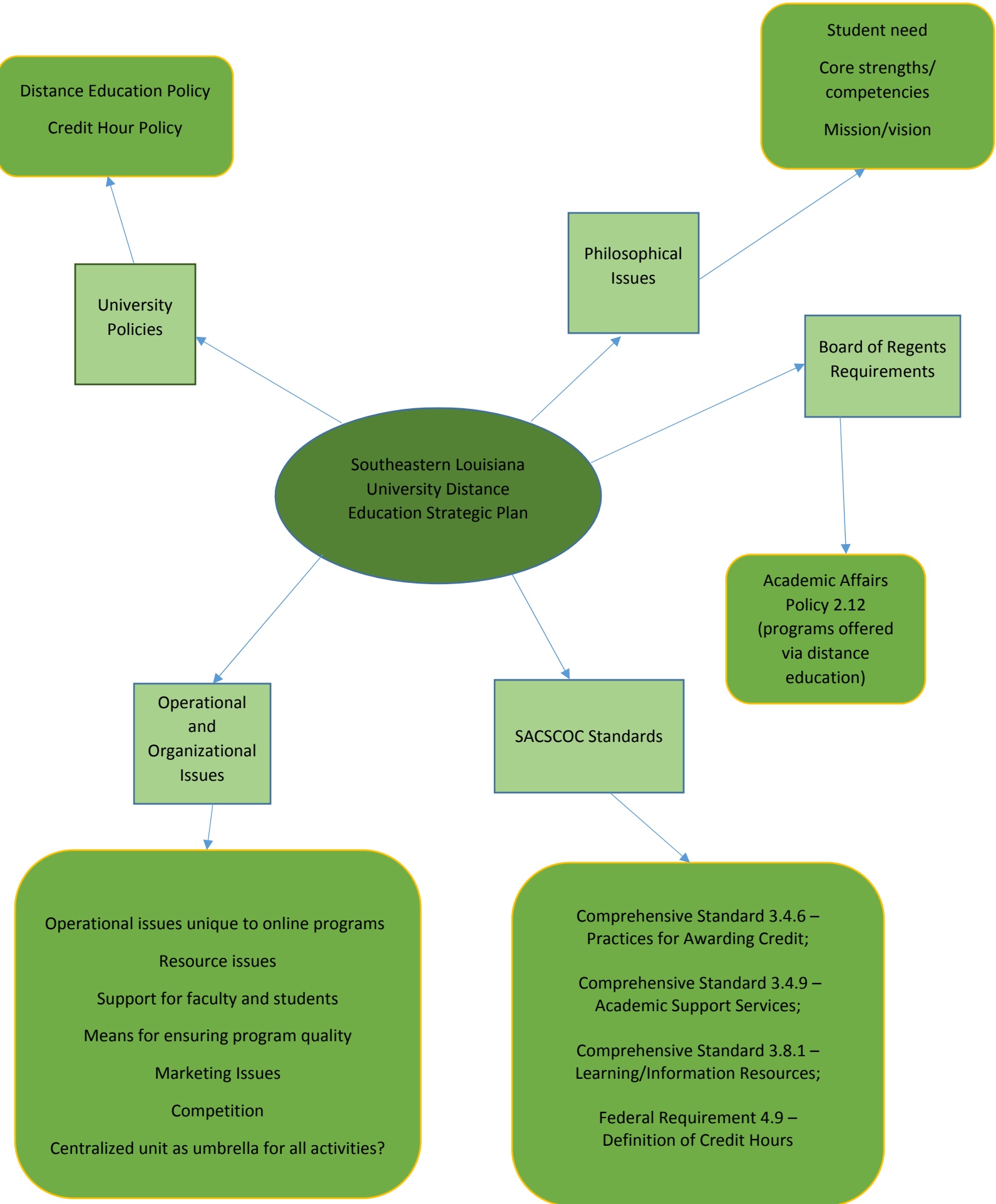
Summary Recommendations

The committee recommends the creation of a standalone unit – The Office of Online Learning – to coordinate Southeastern’s distance education initiatives. This unit would administer all activities related to distance education at Southeastern, as outlined in the strategic priorities and action items presented above. The committee further recommends that the university’s current Distance Education Policy be thoroughly reviewed for practicability (particularly as regards the review process for classes offered via distance education methodologies) and to make the language consistent with this strategic plan for distance education, if adopted.

Appendix A – List of Committee Members

Cindi Baldi
Michael Bisciglia
Ann Carruth
Susan Coats
Tom Devaney
Tim Hudson
Debbie Johnson
Colleen Klein-Ezell
Toni Phillips, Chair
Nena Tucker
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Appendix B - Relevant Factors to be considered in Distance Education Strategic Plan



Distance Education Policy
Credit Hour Policy

Student need
Core strengths/
competencies
Mission/vision

University
Policies

Philosophical
Issues

Board of Regents
Requirements

Southeastern Louisiana
University Distance
Education Strategic Plan

Academic Affairs
Policy 2.12
(programs offered
via distance
education)

Operational
and
Organizational
Issues

SACSCOC Standards

Operational issues unique to online programs
Resource issues
Support for faculty and students
Means for ensuring program quality
Marketing Issues
Competition
Centralized unit as umbrella for all activities?

Comprehensive Standard 3.4.6 –
Practices for Awarding Credit;
Comprehensive Standard 3.4.9 –
Academic Support Services;
Comprehensive Standard 3.8.1 –
Learning/Information Resources;
Federal Requirement 4.9 –
Definition of Credit Hours

Appendix C – Desired Future States

Words or phrases that describe where we WANT to be

1. Innovative programming where students transition between campus experiences and online/distance immersion programs
2. Increase in revenue - new students/adult learners/active duty/veterans
3. Online classes that offer a quality educational experience
4. Distance education programs that strategically address student needs
5. Adequate support for online classes/programs
6. Cost Effective
7. Clearly Identified Distance Degrees
8. Student Friendly
9. Quality Education

Appendix D – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats*

Strengths - positive characteristics/attributes, advantages, etc.

1. Committed faculty to instruction
2. Dedicated Moodle administrator who is awesome (Marcus)
3. Dedicated staff in CFE who work tirelessly to help faculty
4. We have some good online classes
5. Distance education currently has been embraced by many faculty and students
6. Distance education allows for various types of learning styles
7. The support for creating and implementing courses is in place
8. Scheduling of distance education has allowed for students to stay on track with graduation
9. Will work well for motivated students who are unable to attend face-to-face classes

Weaknesses - negative characteristics/attributes, disadvantages, etc.

1. Limited hours for help in CFE - Adjunct faculty work other jobs and have limited access to face-to-face assistance
2. Lack of dedicated resources for Distance Education and Adult Workforce development
3. Reluctance of administrators/faculty to review/embrace overwhelming evidence (research) on impact and effectiveness of online/distance education as a delivery method
4. Need to communicate clear and succinct vision from President/Provost of commitment/support for distance education to attract increased number of students
5. Existing courses often are designed as correspondence courses and lack Quality Matters principles of delivery/ learning
6. Insufficient administrative and support capabilities currently
7. Many degree programs may be over 50% online without realizing it
8. The review of courses in distance education is ineffective
9. The system in place for approving distance education is ineffective
10. There is not a tracking system for distance education courses a student has completed
11. Faculty should be given reassign time to develop/refine quality distance education courses
12. The number of students in distance education courses is low compared to non-distance education courses
13. Insuring student integrity is a challenge
14. Professional development for faculty teaching distance ed should be required to ensure quality
15. It is impossible to have the same instruction quality as face-to-face courses
16. May lose Southeastern's distinctive feature; i.e., professors (not teaching assistants) take care of each individual student
17. There is no guarantee that distance learning is profitable
18. Since there is no need to physically be on campus, potential students can take distance courses in other schools (including in other states) to earn credits
19. Just simply to learn materials, students can take free on-line courses offered by other universities (e.g., MIT)
20. Distance programs often suffer from low completer rates

Appendix C – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (continued)

Opportunities - favorable market/external conditions or factors

1. Aggressively market programs that can be completed online (package/curriculum plans etc.)
2. Design new degree programs hybrid/distance to attract new students
3. Use contract pricing (one price) for the entire degree - turnkey/concierge approach
4. Consider 8-week course offerings
5. Consider online certificate programs - RWR focus
6. Partner with other universities to offer distance education through videoconferencing
7. desire for online classes from some students/potential students
8. Students are coming out of high school better prepared to interact in the distance education format
9. The cost of the distance education courses at SLU is attractive
10. SLU has the ability to be the premier distance education provider in Louisiana
11. Southeastern can differentiate from other universities by NOT offering on-line (distance learning) degree programs and limit on-line courses

Threats/Challenges - unfavorable market/external conditions or factors

1. Lack of dedicated resources to plan, implement and evaluate quality courses/degree programs
2. Competition - we are so far behind in distance education - other universities are much more attractive
3. Need a comprehensive orientation program for faculty and students for success
4. Need to survey high schools to find out their perception of readiness of students for distance education
5. competition from other universities
6. budget situation/cost involved in properly (strategically) expanding/supporting /marketing/administering distance courses
7. distance classes may pull students from traditional classes
8. Instructor never knows if students understand the materials taught

*Note – The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats listed above represent an amalgamation of committee members' input. It is not intended to convey consensus.