Division of eLearning & Professional Studies
Progress Report
October 1, 2014
Dear Stakeholders,

On February 8, 2013, The Board of Trustees of The University of Alabama established the UAB Division of eLearning and Professional Studies (eLPS) to provide campus-wide leadership in four critical areas:

- Develop innovative, totally online degree and certificate programs, which serve untapped, niche markets and produce increased enrollment and new revenue;
- Administer campus-wide, quality assessments of online educational programs for continual improvement;
- Help identify existing UAB courses and programs, which can serve largely untapped, niche markets and their conversion into online delivery formats; and
- Develop a robust portfolio of new, unique professional study opportunities for non-degree seeking adults, which will provide a new source of revenue for UAB.

I am pleased to report that the first eighteen (18) months have been a whirlwind of successes in several areas, which are chronicled in the pages of this Progress Report. During this time period, three environmental factors influenced our Division’s priorities: (1) the upcoming SACSCOC reaccreditation visit in 2015, (2) the transition of the entire UAB campus to a new learning management system (LMS) for online course delivery by Fall 2014, and (3) the UAB Provost’s charge to identify new approaches to fuel online enrollment growth. Importantly, with the establishment of eLPS, UAB now meets the SACSCOC Core Requirement 2.5, which calls for an “integrated, institution-wide” structure and process for continuous improvement in online education. The Division led an extensive, academically-driven LMS evaluation and implementation process, which resulted in a very smooth transition to Canvas® by Instructure as the UAB LMS by Fall 2014. Following a 12-month process of extensive campus meetings, research and due diligence, the Division made a bold recommendation to UAB’s executive leadership for a unique private-public partnership to exponentially grow online enrollment.

Start-up ventures, whether in the private or non-profit business sector, often take on a life of their own as the “marketplace” begins to respond to its products and services. The founding and inaugural 18 months of the Division of eLPS were no different. Organizational culture is the last step in transformational change and I am confident that the foundational first steps have been taken. Special recognition is due to the members of the UAB Online Academic Advisory Council and its standing committee members (listed in this report). They have played a truly critical role in making these foundational steps happen and my gratitude to them is profound, particularly Council Chair, Dr. Jackie Moss. I am privileged to work daily with an extremely talented team of dedicated professionals who are able to stay true to our core values and follow the Board of Trustees’ mandate for this new Division with laser focus. Our university will be the better for it, I’m sure.

Martha W. Bidez, PhD

Executive Director’s Introduction

Resolution

Establishing the Division of eLearning and Professional Studies (eLPS) in the Office of the Provost

WHEREAS, the Office of the Provost at The University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) wishes to create a new academic unit in order to provide campus-wide leadership in four critical areas; and

WHEREAS, the new division will develop innovative, totally online degree and certificate programs, which serve untapped, niche markets and produce increased enrollment and new revenue; and

WHEREAS, the new division will administer campus-wide, quality assessments of online educational programs for continual improvement; and

WHEREAS, the new division will help identify existing UAB courses and programs, which can serve largely untapped, niche markets and their conversion into online delivery formats; and

WHEREAS, the new division will develop a robust portfolio of new, unique professional study opportunities for non-degree seeking adults, which will provide a new source of revenue for UAB; and

WHEREAS, the faculty of the new division will be comprised of the faculty currently appointed to various academic units at UAB, such as the Schools of Medicine, Engineering, and Business, as well as the College of Arts and Sciences; and

WHEREAS, a nationwide search will be conducted to recruit the first Director of the new division;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by The Board of Trustees of The University of Alabama that it approves establishment of the Division of eLearning and Professional Studies in the Office of the Provost at The University of Alabama at Birmingham.

The foregoing was adopted by The Board of Trustees of The University of Alabama at its meeting held February 8, 2013.

Robert E. Witt
The University of Alabama System

Ray L. Watts
President
The University of Alabama at Birmingham

Michael A. Brown
Secretary
The Board of Trustees of The University of Alabama

Robert Witt
Chancellor
The University of Alabama System

Ray L. Watts
M.D., President
The University of Alabama at Birmingham

Michael A. Brown
Secretary
The Board of Trustees of The University of Alabama
A Window to the World

The UAB Online website, developed and maintained by the Division of eLPS, is UAB’s window to the world for online education. Countless hours were spent in meetings with academic units across campus to ensure accuracy of content for each online degree program offered through UAB. The website launched on Monday, May 13, 2013. It continues to serve as a powerful marketing tool for student recruitment and expanding the reach of the UAB brand.

The UAB Online website experienced a high level of activity in the last 12 months. Google Analytics revealed:

- 729,209 page views
- 568,357 unique page views
- 51,087 new users (145,658 total)

Also, the website was designed to provide UAB students with new and much needed resources to succeed as an online student (http://www.uab.edu/online/how-online-learning-works). Among these new tools is an online learning self-assessment test to determine if a student is well suited for online learning.

The number of totally online students (i.e. enrolled only online) experienced an increase of 6.2% since Fall 2013. In comparison, the overall UAB student enrollment (online and on-ground) experienced an increase of 0.7% in the same time period. A total of 8,290 UAB students enrolled in at least one online class, which represents 44.3% of the UAB student population. This does not include the dozens, if not hundreds, of courses that are taught as “flipped class rooms.”
A foundational element of quality online learning is a learning management system (LMS), which meets the myriad needs of both faculty and students. Broad dissatisfaction with the existing campus LMS led to a major undertaking: transitioning from one campus LMS to another in less than 12 months. The Division of eLearning and Professional Studies provided the leadership necessary to develop and manage a smooth, academically driven transition.

A Needs Assessment Survey was administered to UAB faculty teaching online classes in the summer of 2013. Over one-hundred (100) faculty members responded to the survey, which helped form the roadmap of features and benefits needed in a new LMS for UAB.

A first-ever LMS Usability Study was conducted on the UAB campus between September 11 – October 2, 2013. This study, developed and led by eLPS, provided an objective tool to assess the ease and quality of the end user experience with several candidate LMS vendors. One hundred and twenty-five (125) faculty and staff participated in the usability study.

Four Vendor Campus Visits were organized by eLPS to provide a forum to answer faculty and student questions.

The UAB Online Enabling Technology Committee reviewed all evaluation results and made a recommendation to the overall Academic Advisory Council. The Council voted unanimously to recommend to the Provost the adoption of Canvas® by Instructure as the UAB learning management system.

The Division provided over 500 hours of Canvas training for both faculty and students in a variety of formats and venues, including the UAB Online website. At last count, 155 students and 417 faculty members have received formal training through eLPS. The Division employs a dedicated professional to manage all contracts and issues associated with online learning services on campus.

Weekly meetings of all academic LMS administrators are held in the eLPS office.

Moving into the domain of mandatory policies and procedures is a slippery slope on the UAB campus and rightly so. No one wants unnecessary rules and regulations. The University of Alabama Board of Trustees, however, mandated the Division of eLPS to “administer campus-wide, quality assessments of online educational programs for continual improvement.”

The eLPS staff, in collaboration with the Policies and Procedures Committee of the UAB Online Advisory Council, have identified three quality standards to evaluate online education at UAB. The SACSCOC criteria are an obvious choice; however, they are not specific to all aspects of quality online education. The Online Learning Consortium (OLC) Scorecard (formerly Sloan-C Scorecard) provides a university-wide measure of quality online education. Finally, the Quality Matters (QM) rubric is used to assess the quality of individual courses. After 27 committee meetings with eLPS staff, a comprehensive gap analysis has emerged to provide for continual improvement in online educational programs. Gaps will be addressed in the coming years as part of implementing the UAB Online Strategic Plan.
Accessibility is more than just a technical issue. Web access for all users is intentional, proactive and fits seamlessly with the overarching philosophy of our commitment at UAB to diversity. Designing for access by using Universal Design principles allows us to produce a better product and benefits everyone!

The Division of eLearning and Professional Studies has made a thoughtful decision to assist in helping accessibility become a cultural norm at UAB. This decision demonstrates our collective awareness of the diversity of online users. Providing for accessibility is a common thread woven throughout the fabric of our Strategic Plan. The Division’s Staff:

- Collaborated and participated in designing and recording Creating an Accessible Online Learning Environment, the training module sponsored by DSS for faculty and staff that is currently housed in the Faculty and Staff Learning System.
- Developed a four hour, on-demand course called Fundamentals of Accessible Online TLC (Teaching, Learning and Communication). This course is now available free to all UAB employees.
- Are collaborating with the Instructional Design Consortium (IDC), to complete a Self-Evaluation to determine the percentage of online courses and materials that are fully accessible.
- eLPS’ staff have a Transition Plan in place to move us toward full accessibility of online content by the year 2020. This plan includes:
  - Continuing to provide training & resources to improve access
  - Continuing to work with the IDC for continual improvement
  - Continuing to participate on the DSS Existing and Emerging Technologies committee to assist in shaping policies and practices that influence accessibility
  - Continuing to work through our committees to insure goals of the strategic plan related to accessibility are met
  - Providing financial resources to assist with the captioning and transcribing of online course content (a commitment of at least $500,000 over the next 5 years)

An unexpected challenge emerged in the Division's start-up period with the need to achieve “authorization,” on a state-by-state basis, to allow out-of-state students access to UAB’s online courses. The staff of eLPS assumed primary responsibility for this daunting challenge in September 2013, when only 1 state was authorized. As of October, 2014, UAB was authorized to provide online education to students in 44 states.

61 meetings were held with local, state and national stakeholders, including the UA System Office to respond to state authorization issues.

Cost savings of $150,650 in state fees due to exemption strategy developed by eLPS

“Lisa Reburn, who is responsible for state authorization for UAB, has been especially diligent to keep in touch with and respond to the work of the Negotiated Rulemaking Committee and the Department of Education. She continues to keep a close eye on this complicated matter. Her diligent work, along with her analysis and suggestions sent to the committee, were used to help inform the discussions and decisions made by the DOE and to provide leadership for both the UA system and our state.”

Dr. Charles Nash
Vice Chancellor for Academic & Student Affairs,
University of Alabama System
A certificate course on the Fundamentals for Accessible Online TLC (Teaching, Learning and Communication) has been developed and offered for fee to the public and without fee, as a value-added service to UAB employees.

The VPP Excellence in Safety Certificate Program has been developed as a first of its kind, totally online, Voluntary Protection Program Participants’ Association (VPPPA) endorsed certification program.

A series of courses on Workplace Violence and Awareness has been developed as totally online, self-paced learning material.

Active Certificate Programs and Courses

Community Outreach

The Professional Studies programs and courses are a means to provide professional development and career building knowledge to the local community and the regional corporate community as well. Also, UAB’s excellent reputation as a world-class university allows our reach to cover the globe, with inquiries for our courses coming from as far away as India.

“Southern Company is very interested in partnering with UAB Professional Studies to help meet the education and training needs of our workforce. The online delivery method is particularly great for reaching out to our 28,000 employees located throughout the southeast. We’re excited about what the future may hold.”

Kimberly S. Greene, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Southern Company

University Professional & Continuing Education Association (UPCEA)

eLPS has sponsored a UAB membership to the UPCEA,

IACET

The Division of eLearning and Professional Studies has initiated an application for IACET Approved Provider accreditation. eLPS intends to successfully complete the process by September 2015. Becoming an IACET approved provider will bring recognized quality status to all UAB Professional Studies’ learning events. This recognition by IACET will allow learning event participants to be secure in the knowledge that the event continuing education units (CEUs) will be accepted by most, if not all organizations internationally.

Quality Matters Continuing and Professional Education (QM CPE)

eLPS has sponsored a UAB membership to the Quality Matters Continuing and Professional Education rubrics. QM CPE has developed, in collaboration with the

Professional Studies

University Professional & Continuing Education Association, a Continuing and Professional Education Rubric and course review process.
President Ray Watts and Provost Linda Lucas charged the Division of eLearning and Professional Studies to conduct a campus-wide strategic planning process for online education at UAB. Beginning in July 2013, the entire UAB community participated in developing a bold strategic plan for UAB Online.

Clarus Consulting Group (Birmingham, AL) was retained as an objective, external facilitator for the strategic planning process.

A Steering Committee was selected to provide cross-representation of key leaders across campus.

17 stakeholders were interviewed by Clarus, including executive leadership at UAB and the academic Deans.

3 focus groups were held with the Instructional Designer’s Consortium, the UAB Faculty Senate’s Academic Program Review Committee (APRC) and the Graduate Council Advisory Advisory Council (ADCOM).

A public survey was posted on the UAB Online website for anyone to comment anonymously.

A day-long retreat was held with over 75 key stakeholders from across campus to discuss the framework and overarching priorities of the Strategic Plan.

Working Groups were formed during the Fall of 2013, in order to align the priorities and objectives with each strategic goal.

The final, proposed Strategic Plan was submitted to the Provost and President in January 2014.

Implementation is underway with eLPS staff working closely with the UAB Online Academic Advisory Council and its standing committees.

**Our Goals**

**GOAL 1:** Achieve recognition as a global leader in quality online education

**GOAL 2:** Join the vanguard of online teaching and learning

**GOAL 3:** Create a learning community of successful, online students who are engaged with the university, the faculty and each other

**GOAL 4:** Foster a world-class faculty who are inspired and professionally fulfilled by teaching in an online environment

**GOAL 5:** Provide cutting-edge campus technology and infrastructure that ensures faculty and student success

**Our Objectives**

**QUALITY CURRICULUM**

Deliver clear, consistent, university-wide practice guidelines and policies that address online quality issues

Ensure online education content and delivery is aligned with SACSCOC, and OLC, Quality Matters or other standards

Deliver effective and engaging faculty training to achieve high quality online education

**UNIVERSITY SUCCESS**

Expand the research capacity of UAB in the field of online teaching and learning

Establish strategic partnerships to fuel growth in online education

Increase online enrollments

Diversify UAB student population with the online, adult learner market

**FACULTY SUCCESS**

Develop faculty-driven incentives and recognition strategies for online, adjunct teaching faculty

Ensure faculty evaluation measures are aligned with online goals

Provide personalized instructional design and online pedagogy support

Create strong mentorship and communities of practice programs for faculty

Support professional development of online faculty

**STUDENT SUCCESS**

Provide equivalent access to university support services for online and face-to-face students

Provide systems for authentication and verification of online student identity

Ensure all online course content is compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (as amended)

Provide online technology support and training for students

Establish a technology-enhanced, comprehensive approach to enhancing student retention & on-time degree completion

**ENABLING TECHNOLOGY**

Provide a state-of-the-art portfolio of reliable, user-friendly, learning technology tools

Provide state-of-the-art, scalable IT infrastructure for the delivery of world-class, online education

Develop streamlined and efficient administrative operations

Deliver customer-centric, integrated technical support services for online faculty and students

Provide enhanced universal design and accessible instructional technology for online users

**Our Values**

**RESPECT**

We Value all Voices

**SERVICE**

We Practice Servant Leadership

**TEAM SPIRIT**

We are Part of One University

**INTEGRITY**

We are Honest and Transparent

**OWNERSHIP**

We Find Solutions & Make it Happen
“Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.”

John F. Kennedy