

# Truman State University Strategic Plan for Online Learning

## Executive Summary

The Online Strategic Planning Committee was charged to develop a plan and, if appropriate, recommend policies aimed at advancing Truman State University's work in offering courses to students (primarily at a distance) using online delivery. The charge is, in part, a response to recommendations from the Higher Learning Commission stemming from their April 2011 site visit extending Truman's accreditation to include limited fully-online programs.

The committee reviewed available information and research, and identified the following definition, opportunities, barriers and recommendations for how Truman might proceed.

### DEFINITION: What is an Online Course?

An online course is a course wherein more than 75% of the faculty-student interaction and course content delivery is achieved by electronic means. (Based in part on the definition used by the Higher Learning Commission.)

### OPPORTUNITIES: Where Could Truman Focus Online Coursework Efforts to be Most Beneficial?

*Truman should focus attention on online coursework activities that:*

Create an alternative to taking summer courses at other institutions and transferring them back to Truman.

Expand and enhance graduate program delivery.

Provide continuing education and professional development to alumni and others.

Are a possible vehicle for fostering degree completion efforts.

Strategically expand entrepreneurial educational offerings.

### BARRIERS:

1. State, Federal and Accreditation agencies all have positions regarding expected best practices for online learning and these are not always consistent with those for face-to-face experiences. They often exceed them.
2. Providing online courses or programs adds additional regulatory, compliance, and reporting responsibilities that necessitate supporting policies.
3. Policies principally aimed at curtailing the abuses for large, for-profit, providers have had the concomitant effect of increasing the burden on traditional colleges and universities.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

*First and foremost, the online strategy must align with Truman's mission and vision (additional curriculum and strategic planning alignment issues are identified in the full report).*

1. Online education at Truman should be viewed as a resource to support the Mission and Vision of Truman State University, not to supplant it.
2. While face-to-face learning on Truman's campus is still optimal, creating mechanisms whereby students complete *more* of their learning from Truman – *even if online* – should be viewed as superior to a situation in which students assemble larger and larger portions of their degree from sources over which Truman has *no oversight*.
3. Online education is a means toward supporting our statewide liberal arts and sciences mission, by bringing Truman quality programs and liberal learning to those non-traditional audiences who cannot come to Truman but would benefit from our coursework.

**The following recommendations articulate broad goals and suggest specific actions to be taken to realize those goals.**

### **Goals for Online Learning**

- (1) Access to Truman-quality online courses should be improved for both Truman students needing summer coursework and non-Truman students interested in a Truman learning experience.
- (2) Faculty and administrators should make thoughtful efforts to identify and develop those courses which are truly appropriate for online delivery.
- (3) Efforts should be strengthened to ensure that online course offerings are of consistently high quality and in keeping with nationally-established best practices.
- (4) Support services for students enrolled in online courses should be substantially improved.
- (5) Faculty development opportunities should be expanded and support resources should be improved.
- (6) Policies relevant to teaching in the online environment should be periodically reviewed (or new ones created) to keep policies consistent with best practices in online learning.
- (7) Online courses should be subjected to improved assessment strategies reflective of the exigencies of teaching at a distance.
- (8) Infrastructure and oversight should be improved to provide necessary support for distance learning.

### **Strategies for Achieving Online Learning Goals**

A summary of recommendations pertaining to curriculum, assessment, student and faculty support, and infrastructure follow, with additional detail available in the full report.

#### ***Access to Truman-quality online courses should be improved for both Truman students needing summer coursework and non-Truman students interested in a Truman learning experience.***

- The University should work to ensure that every department possible has at least one fully online course available to students during the summer, recognizing that some disciplines employ pedagogies that lack a convenient virtual equivalent.
- The University should increase the number of fully online courses offered during the summer in the Liberal Studies Program (LSP).
- The University should increase the number of professional development and elective courses offered online to meet the needs to external audiences and students wishing to add value to their existing degree programs. Such coursework could include stand-alone courses, graduate certificates, or fully-online degree or degree completion programs.
- The University should target for development courses in areas where other Missouri institutions do not offer online opportunities or where demand outstrips supply at their home institutions.
- The University should take the necessary steps to ensure that students admitted to, or registering for, online courses or programs are sufficiently prepared for, and sufficiently aware of, the unique needs of the student in an online classroom.
- The University should seek to attain levels of retention and student performance for fully online courses and programs comparable to that of traditional, in-seat courses.

#### ***Faculty and administrators should make thoughtful efforts to identify and develop those courses which are truly appropriate for online delivery.***

- The University should work with schools and departments to identify courses that are appropriate for online delivery.
- The University should work with schools and departments to conduct needs assessments and demand analysis to establish viability of new online courses in targeted areas.
- The University should incentivize faculty involvement in the development of online courses through summer grants and competitive compensation.
- Truman should investigate the student/public need and/or advantages of developing and implementing Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and digital “badges.”

#### ***Efforts should be strengthened to ensure that online course offerings are of consistently high quality and in keeping with nationally established best practices.***

- Procedures for faculty approval, faculty governance review, and post-implementation assessment should be reviewed, updated, and then consistently applied to all new offerings.
- Assessment strategies should be developed that take into account the inherent differences between teaching in face-to-face and online environments. These new strategies should be implemented with an eye toward assessing both the effectiveness of the instructor, as well as the effectiveness of the delivery modality.
- The University should adopt nationally-accepted quality rubrics, such as those promoted by the Sloan Consortium, Quality Matters, and similar organizations and initiatives, to help ensure that online offerings are built consistent with contemporary best practices.

***Support services for students enrolled in online courses should be substantially improved.***

- Student services historically designed for face-to-face learners must be adapted to serve the needs of distance learners.
- Disability services need to be adapted to be proactive, rather than reactive, with respect to the needs of online learners.
- Technological support needs to be made available at times which respect the unique schedules of online learners.
- When and if fully online programs develop on campus, distance learners should be provided with representation in the appropriate student governance bodies at the University.

***Faculty development opportunities should be expanded and support resources should be improved.***

- All faculty teaching online courses should be required to take a course in teaching for the online environment before teaching online for Truman.
- Veteran online teachers should be afforded routine professional development opportunities to remain current on educational technology.

***Policies relevant to teaching in the online environment should be periodically reviewed (or new ones created) to keep policies consistent with best practices in online learning.***

- Policies pertaining to online education should be reviewed with the support of a steering committee composed of faculty, administrators, information technology personnel, and appropriate students. This committee should be further charged with evaluating the consistency of online offerings with the University mission and vision.
- The policy on intellectual property should be appropriately published and reviewed so faculty are fully aware of their rights with respect to online course materials.
- Policies pertaining to the ethical management of online courses, the intellectual property of third parties, student privacy, distinct student services, and other topics of unique significance to the online environment should be made readily available to students, faculty, and staff, as appropriate.

***Online courses should be subjected to improved assessment strategies reflective of the exigencies of teaching at a distance.***

- An assessment plan for online courses and programs should be adopted.
- Assessment tools should be developed that respect the unique differences between face-to-face, blended, and fully online courses.
- Efforts should be made to use assessment tools to compare like sections in online and non-online environments as a basis for establishing whether significant differences in student performance are observable.
- Students in online courses should be regularly surveyed about service functions of the University as they pertain to online courses and whether those functions adequately meet their needs in a virtual environment.
- Where they exist, fully or largely online programs should be regularly assessed based on performance indicators such as completion rates, student satisfaction, job placement or advancement, and employer feedback.

***Infrastructure and oversight should be improved to provide necessary support for distance learning.***

- A central location in University administration should be identified with the task of managing online course development and assessment, professional development, and technical support, as well as the review and enforcement of policies pertaining to online education at the University. This office should also be responsible for monitoring the University's compliance with state, regional, and national accreditation expectations with respect to distance learning.
- The University should undertake periodic reviews of its Learning Management System to determine whether optimal services are being obtained at a cost that is justifiable to the institution.
- The University should *thoughtfully* expand the infrastructure necessary to capture, edit, and enhance audio, video, and other content for online distribution.
- The University should invest in more personnel to support the development of online courses and the support for faculty professional development in the area of distance learning.

## President's Charge

*The Online Strategic Planning Committee was charged to develop a plan and, if appropriate, recommend policies aimed at advancing Truman State University's work in offering courses to students (primarily at a distance) using online delivery. The charge is, in part, a response to recommendations from the Higher Learning Commission stemming from their April 2011 site visit extending Truman's accreditation to include limited fully-online programs.*

### List of Committee Members

- Sal Costa, Representing Faculty Senate
- Ruthie Dare-Halma, Representing the School of Science and Mathematics
- Doug Davenport, Representing Deans
- Maria DiStefano, Representing the Graduate School
- Jason Lin, School of Business
- Donna Liss, Chief Information Officer
- Julie Lochbaum, Representing the School of Health Sciences and Education
- Shirley McKamie, Representing the School of Arts and Letters
- Diane Richmond, Representing Learning Technologies and Instructional Design Services
- Fred Shaffer, Representing the School of Social and Cultural Studies

Representatives to the Committee were drawn from each School of the University with care to select individuals with either knowledge of online learning, experience in online instruction, experience in faculty development, or an interest in the potential of such programming. Not all committee members, however, had experience in online education. Faculty Senate was invited to select a representative to serve on the Committee. Dr. DiStefano, Dr. Davenport, and Diane Richmond were also asked to serve to bring perspectives on graduate education, regional accreditation, and instructional design support to the process. The President asked Donna Liss and Dr. Minch to serve as Co-Chairs.

### Constituencies Consulted

**The draft proposal was posted online for general review. Feedback was gathered via email, through two public forums facilitated by the committee, and through targeted meetings with:**

- **Faculty Senate**
- **Faculty Senate Undergraduate Council**
- **Faculty Senate Graduate Council**
- **Student Senate**
- **President's Administrative Council**
- **Deans**

## Preamble and Guiding Principles

### Vision Statement

Truman State University seeks to provide students expanded opportunities for learning in online environments, where appropriate to the curriculum and student needs, with improved student services, enhanced faculty development, rigorous assessment, and a commitment to best practices in teaching and learning.

### Need

An increased demand for coursework delivered online has emerged in the past decade. “Nearly a third of all full-time and part-time students at nonprofit and for-profit colleges and universities in America took one or more online courses [in 2010], according to the Sloan Consortium, which has documented the rising enrollments in such courses since 2002. Other recent surveys suggest the growth in online education will only continue to be strong.”<sup>1</sup> Additionally, changes in the U.S. economy in recent years have increased interest in retraining, which in turn, has helped fuel growth in both face-to-face and online enrollments.<sup>2</sup> For many institutions, particularly private sector colleges and universities,<sup>3</sup> online coursework is increasingly considered a strategic choice in their portfolio of offerings.

While demand among students nationally is not a singular justification for embracing online learning, it helps to describe the context within which colleges and universities must make their programming choices. Further, these trends help educational leaders to appreciate the likelihood their investments will pay dividends.

For a university such as Truman, whose “bread and butter” is a traditional, four-year, residential experience, online education has a different role to play – one primarily aimed at students who cannot be efficiently served in Kirksville or at certain points in the calendar.

- Online courses provide an opportunity for regularly matriculated Truman students to take Truman courses while pursuing summer employment, internships, or living with family during summer months. For those unable to afford staying in Kirksville, online courses from Truman present an alternative to taking courses from another institution.
- Online courses (or fully-online programs) present one of the most likely ways to grow graduate enrollments beyond their present levels. As Truman’s existing graduate programs rely primarily on enrollments from *among* recent Truman undergraduates, building new graduate programs that rely primarily on students coming from *outside* the university faces several challenges. These challenges include location, infrastructure, staff, and other start-up costs. Some of these challenges can be mitigated when offering instruction at a distance.
- Online courses provide the most practical means of offering continuing education and professional development coursework to alumni and other interested parties who are, for the most part, located well beyond a practical commuting distance from the University.
- Should the University wish to offer degree completion opportunities to its former students, online delivery will likely provide the most practical means to serving more mature learners who may hold full-time jobs or not find the traditional residential undergraduate experience attractive.

The most pressing need for online courses is probably most clearly demonstrated in the summer, where online enrollments have remained steady, or increased, over the last several years while face-to-face enrollments have consistently declined.

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<sup>1</sup> Green, Kenneth C. and Ellen Wagner. “Online Education: Where Is It Going? What Should Boards Know?” *Trusteeship*. January/February 2011: 2.

<sup>2</sup> Guess, Andy. “As Economy Waivers, Online Enrollments Climb.” *Inside Higher Ed*. November 13, 2008. <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2008/11/13/sloan>

<sup>3</sup> Seaman, Jeff. *Online Learning Trends in Private Sector Colleges and Universities*. Pearson Babson Survey Research Group. March 2011: 2.

## Definitions of Key Terms

Definitions of terms by leading figures in online and distance education vary somewhat, but the terminology becomes most important when it is deployed by accrediting bodies who use these terms to measure whether an institution is meeting certain expectations. The definitions we offer here, therefore, serve as relevant background regarding the expectations of government and leading organizations in the field. We conclude this section with a working definition of our own that we employ for the purposes of this document.

According to the Higher Learning Commission, “Distance-delivered **courses** are those in which all or the vast majority (typically 75% or more) of the instruction and interaction occurs via electronic communication, correspondence, or equivalent mechanisms, with the faculty and students physically separated from each other. Distance-delivered **programs** are those certificate or degree programs in which 50% or more of the required courses may be taken as distance-delivered **courses**.”<sup>4</sup> This said, some states set the bar lower suggesting a course in which more than 50% of the instruction is delivered at a distance is considered distance education. **In some instances, Truman courses that are currently taught as hybrid/blended courses would meet those definitions by virtue of how they allocate their online and face-to-face time.** State and federal law requires colleges and university to register their operations in states whose residents take the institution’s online courses. As such localized definitions may be operative in certain instances – particularly when serving non-degree seeking or graduate students. It is, in part, for this reason that Truman cannot afford to long remain without an articulated vision and policies with respect to online and blended learning. Consider these definitions:

**Hybrid Course of Study:** combines face-to-face instructional experiences with significant web-based or web-assisted learning components in the same course, serving to reduce the face-to-face meeting time by at least 30%. The Sloan Consortium postulates this percentage to establish a threshold for this label.

**Blended Course of Study:** not unlike a hybrid, some literature can also refer to using technology more intensively in this classroom environment – not simply as a tool for asynchronous engagement. Many authors, including the Sloan Consortium, would say the e-component must be at least 30% of the course in order to meet the threshold for this label since Sloan uses “hybrid” and “blended” synonymously.

**Distributed Learning:** involves an environment in which learners and instructor(s) are separated primarily by time. Although sometimes the cause of this time separation is geographic location, distributed learning emphasizes that not all members of a course are progressing together through the course on the same timetable. Thus, one could be engaged in distributed learning in a traditional classroom environment or an online environment, depending on the deadlines and expectations set by the instructor.

**Mobile Learning:** refers to learning across contexts – such as in the field, during events with friends, as well as in the classroom – and learning through/with/on mobile devices. Some courses are beginning to employ mobile devices, such as smartphones, to create “on the spot” learning materials.

**Open Courseware:** refers to course content such as lectures, exercises, assignments, and assessments that are available for free via the Internet. Typically open courseware is self-paced, and accessed on demand, with some of the most notable providers being MIT, Harvard, and Stanford. However, some providers are stepping forward to provide free or low-cost credentialing for completion of open courseware content and an accompanying assessment.

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<sup>4</sup> Higher Learning Commission, Distance Delivery Application. June 25, 2012. <http://www.ncahlc.org/Information-for-Institutions/institutional-change.html> (See Appendix A)

**Dual Credit:** According to the Missouri Department of Higher Education, “Dual credit courses enable high school students to receive, simultaneously, both high school and college-level course credit....Dual credit courses may be taught by full time college faculty who instruct high school students either on campus or in the high school via on-site instruction or interactive television. Dual credit courses may also be taught using the same modes of delivery by adjunct faculty who may teach part time both on the college campus and at the high school site. However, the large majority of dual credit courses are taught by high school faculty with supervision by on-campus college faculty.”<sup>5</sup> Some colleges and universities have begun to harness technology to provide dual credit courses at a distance, primarily through the use of interactive television, teleconferencing equipment, or online.

**Dual Enrollment:** According to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) “Dual enrollment is defined as high school students taking postsecondary classes and who are physically present on the postsecondary education campus for those classes.”<sup>6</sup> The line between dual enrollment and online classes through a college, however, is not entirely clear when students enroll for such classes during the summer or in the evening. The principal function of the dual enrollment definition is to account for a student’s average daily attendance contribution at their local school, where enrollment in evening or summer classes is largely at the discretion of the campus granting the credit. Thus, many high school students do enroll for online credit through colleges and universities and study outside of their normal school day or year.

Typically, there is also a range of definitions that describe the degree to which an academic program is online. Using the Higher Learning Commission’s definitions, we can describe the continuum as follows, in order from least to most intensive in their use of content delivered online (sometimes called “e-learning intensive”:

HLC Online Course Definition: Online courses are considered a specialized subset of distance-delivered courses, with the key consideration being that the faculty and students are physically separated. Given this requirement, a course is considered “online” if 75% or more of the content is delivered electronically with the faculty and students physically separated from each other.

1. **Traditional Program**—The program may include a mix of traditional, web-enhanced, or blended/hybrid courses but all courses require some face-to-face sessions.
2. **Mixed Program** – The program includes both face-to-face and online courses, but fewer than 50% of the courses meet HLC’s definition of “online.”
3. **Fully Online Program** – More than 50% of the courses in the program meet the HLC’s definition of “online.”

One will quickly appreciate that the Higher Learning Commission’s threshold for a distance course, or a distance program, sets the bar below that of a truly “fully online” program. So, for the purposes of accreditation, any program composed of 50% or more courses which individually provide 75% or more of their content at a distance (such as online) are effectively fully distance programs. That said, because Truman must comply with the state regulations of many of the states in which it has students at a distance, adherence only to the HLC definition could exclude Truman from offering its courses to students in some locales.

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<sup>5</sup> Missouri Department of Higher Education. Dual Credit Policy. 23, April 2009. <http://www.dhe.mo.gov/policies/dual-credit.php>.

<sup>6</sup> Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. State of Missouri. “Graduation Requirements for Students in Missouri Public Schools Effective for Graduates of the Class of 2010.” January 2007, 35. <http://dese.mo.gov/divimprove/sia/gradindex.htm>.

### **A Truman Definition**

Keeping the Higher Learning Commission's definitions in mind, for the purposes of this document and Truman policy making with respect to online learning, this Committee proposes the following definition.

"An online course is a course wherein more than 75% of the faculty-student interaction and course content delivery is achieved by electronic means."

The committee acknowledges that the actual quantification of electronic versus face-to-face interaction is a challenging enterprise. Indeed, there are some faculty engaged in "hybrid" or "blended" courses that would approach or pass the 75% threshold. For our purposes, this definition serves to establish a starting point, informed by accreditation standards, for addressing the unique environment of online learning.

## **State, Regional, and National Policy Environment**

The regulatory environment for online education can best be characterized as a moving target. As with many new innovations, technological innovations have raced ahead of regulation. Now, as state, regional, and national bodies are catching-up to the innovations of the 1990s and early 2000s, educational innovators are once again jumping ahead of policy makers. As a result, colleges and universities need to remain nimble in the face of changing policies.

### **MDHE Expectations with Respect to Online Learning**

On April 13, 2000, the Missouri Coordinating Board of Higher Education offered its “Principles of Good Practice for Distance Learning and Web-Based Courses.” These principles are meant to apply to asynchronous programs delivered via the Internet, via websites, or through other means of audio visual distribution.<sup>7</sup> When adding a new program or changing existing programs, it is expected that a college or university will notify MDHE of its intention to offer the program online. A copy of the MDHE’s “Principles of Good Practice for Distance-Learning/Web-Based Courses” is attached in Appendix B.

### **HLC Expectations with Respect to Online Learning**

The Higher Learning Commission has not only exerted increasingly detailed scrutiny of online programs within its jurisdiction, but it has also faced increasing pressure from the federal government to apply additional oversight to online programs. The result of this, in the view of some, has been a substantially increased workload for the HLC’s staff, peer reviewers, and colleges and universities themselves. As the Substantive Change Application for Distance Learning (Appendix A) demonstrates, HLC seeks to evaluate the growth of online programs at each stage of their development – beginning with their initiation and following the institution through their subsequent expansion to additional programs. Consortia with other institutions or businesses supporting online program development trigger further scrutiny.

The Higher Learning Commission has suggested a number of “best practices” for online programs, endorsing recommendations offered in 2001 by the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (CRAC) and the Western Cooperative for Educational Technologies (WCET). These standards cover issues ranging from student support services, to training for faculty teaching online, to policies for accessibility, protection of intellectual property, and addressing students concerns and complaints. A copy of these best practices, as articulated by CRAC, WCET, and other regional accrediting bodies, is located in Appendix C. While these standards are helpful guides, it should always be noted that an institution is, first and foremost, evaluated for reaccreditation based on the Higher Learning Commission’s Criteria for Accreditation.<sup>8</sup> The recommended best practices for online and distance education dovetail well with these broader accreditation standards. It is also worth noting that these best practices themselves will evolve with changes in technology and that there are, in fact, many similar best practices documents offered by individual states and organizations.

### **Federal Expectations with Respect to Online Learning**

With the expansion of online learning and, in particular, the growth of large for-profit institutions, the federal government has become increasingly concerned with the quality of online educational experiences. While federal officials seem excited about the potential for online education to broaden access to students not

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<sup>7</sup> Missouri Department of Higher Education Policy for the Review of Academic Program Proposal. July 11, 2011 <http://www.dhe.mo.gov/files/policies/policyforreview.pdf>, pp. 7-8.

<sup>8</sup> Higher Learning Commission. Criteria for Accreditation. June 25, 2012. <http://www.ncahlc.org/Information-for-Institutions/criteria-for-accreditation.html>

previously reached by traditional higher education, they are nonetheless concerned about programs that enroll students and then provide them no support – particularly when federal financial aid money is involved.

The federal government is having an impact on online education in a number of ways.

First, the federal government is concerned about the meaning of the “credit hour.” Federal regulations now require colleges and universities to articulate how they arrive at their valuation of a credit hour. While institutions have some latitude in how the credit hour is defined, and may consider various metrics for awarding credit toward a degree, a more standardized definition is used for federal financial aid purposes. The Higher Learning Commission, as part of its oversight, expects institutions to describe their process for valuing a credit hour, including for online courses. This, naturally, requires institutions to give greater thought to how they measure student work in an asynchronous context.

Second, the federal government is attempting to ensure that online programs are approved (or registered) with the appropriate state agencies in each state in which they operate. Nearly every state in the Union has its own regulations regarding oversight of online programs operating within their state. States vary as to whether their requirements are triggered by students taking individual courses, or entire programs. States may also look to whether an institution employs instructors in their state, offers internships or clinical experiences in their state, or advertises in their state. In 2010 the U.S. Department of Education issued a policy requiring all institutions to be fully compliant with the laws of the states in which they enrolled students for distance education or face the loss of federal financial aid funds. The courts issued an injunction on the implementation of this policy, but it has been widely believed that the policy will be reworded and enter back into force soon. There have been more recent indications that this may be forestalled, but no definitive decisions appear to have been made. Despite the delay in, or cancellation of, enforcement of the federal law, an institution in violation of a state’s individual policies can still be deemed to be “breaking the law” if a student from that state elects to take an online course from an unregistered institution. In practical terms, the most immediate impact of such a violation might be that the credential issued by the institution would be void in the student’s state of residency, though there theoretically could be more dramatic penalties. National continuing education organizations, and other higher education advocacy groups are looking for ways to create a national system of reciprocity, but such a system is likely some ways off. In the meantime Truman’s strategy has been to seek approval in those states where approval can be expeditiously and affordably obtained. Indeed, there is still a vast market for online offerings within Missouri, even if offerings in other states are not pursued.

Third, the federal government has placed restrictions on the ability of a University to compel payment for an online course in which a student has never signed-on. This policy reflects a fear by the federal government that student aid dollars are being paid-out to online institutions for courses in which students never participate. Thus, while they rarely publicize this, colleges and universities are obligated to provide a full refund for online courses if a student never signs-on to the course (such as never logging-in to Blackboard or Moodle).

Fourth, new requirements on F-1 visas (for international students) indicate students may not count more than 1 course (3 credit hours) of online course enrollment toward the regulatory requirement of full-time enrollment during the fall or spring semesters.

These are just a few examples of federal scrutiny of online programs.

Federal interest in online education can best be characterized as concern for the integrity and comparability of coursework supported by student aid. Politically, this scrutiny has intensified in response to the high default rates of students enrolled in programs offered by online, for-profit institutions. Unfortunately, public, non-profit institutions have been forced to carry the bulk of the regulatory burden while competing with well-funded and heavily-staffed for-profits.

## Online Learning and the Truman Mission and Curriculum

### Alignment of Online Learning with Mission and Vision

Online education at Truman should be viewed as a resource to *support* the Mission and Vision of Truman State University, not to *supplant* it. Truman's identity is firmly rooted in a traditional, residential model of education. At the same time Truman recognizes the importance of this model in its institutional history, it must not lose sight of the fact that it is to "offer an exemplary undergraduate education...in the context of a public institution of higher education." Toward that end Truman should look for ways to bring the liberal arts and sciences to audiences of students who cannot easily access these experiences in the traditional manner while supporting its residential students when they need to take the occasional course from a distance – such as during the summer months.

Truman should be particularly concerned about the increasingly disaggregated educational experience of undergraduate students. Most Truman students complete their degrees with a significant number of credits coming from outside of the University – through dual credit, advanced placement, and coursework transferred from other institutions, including 2-year colleges and other 4-year institutions. While face-to-face learning on Truman's campus is still optimal, creating mechanisms whereby students complete *more* of their learning from Truman – *even if* online – should be viewed as superior to a situation in which students assemble larger and larger portions of their degree from sources over which Truman has *no oversight*.

Furthermore, the Truman Mission Statement recognizes a broader duty to:

offer services to the community, the region, and the state in the areas of research and public service that are natural outgrowths of the academic mission of the University, and strive to ensure that the University serves as a cultural resource for the broader community of which it is an integral part.

While this statement points principally to services outside of the scope of traditional classroom activity, online education offers a vehicle for service – for spreading Truman's knowledge base – to constituencies not optimally served by our residential environment. Graduate programs, workforce development opportunities, workshops, and continuing education programs are not easily delivered to our alumni, potential K-12 or industry partners, or pre-college students through traditional, residential means.

### Alignment of Online Learning with the University Strategic Plan

Truman's Strategic Plan for 2011-2015 articulates three themes: (1) Preparing Students for Tomorrow and Beyond, (2) Securing Financial Stability and Growth, and (3) Building Community and Collaboration. While this plan continues Truman's predominantly residential-focused approach to education, a number of points suggest an important relationship to be had between online learning and the University's goals.

In calling, in Theme One, for "engaging, effective and adaptive learning environments" the plan notes "These shifts will require strategies that will help provide a successful educational experiences for all qualified students regardless of their unique backgrounds."<sup>9</sup> This need to adapt to diverse constituencies is echoed again in Theme Two when it is observed that "Strategies and action plans associated with this goal [building overall enrollment] will result in a steady stream of first year, transfer, graduate, international and even part-time and non-traditional students who possess qualifications consistent with our admissions status."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> p. 1

<sup>10</sup> p. 5

Theme One also calls for attention to support services with the goal of enhancing “student success and well-being.”<sup>11</sup> Even in the absence of fully-online programs, this plan will articulate the need for even greater attention toward support services for student and faculty use of technology. Once again, the Strategic Plan acknowledges that “These strategies and actions should also serve to prepare our institution for the needs of students who may be substantially different in terms of demographics than our current student populations.”<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Strategic Plan point 1.4 suggests that “pedagogical approaches that integrate classroom learning with authentic life experiences are critical.”<sup>13</sup> Part of acknowledging the contemporary life experiences of our students is recognizing the critical role technology plays in their life, learning, and future careers.

From a fiscal perspective the relationship of online learning to the University bottom line cannot be overstated. Theme 2.1 of the Strategic Plan calls for Truman to “Diversify funding sources;” theme 2.2 calls for increased diversity in undergraduate and graduate enrollment, and theme 2.3 calls for support of the efforts of “the Truman Institute to increase institutional revenue...” Theme 2.5 specifically calls for increased organizational effectiveness and enhanced student learning through the “innovative and appropriate use of technologies” suggesting, “It can also improve the learning experience of our students by supporting an educational environment that reflects their lives now and into the future.”<sup>14</sup>

Theme Three seeks to build community and enhance collaboration. Specifically, theme 3.5 aims to “Expand the public profile of Truman by strengthening our image and communicating our unique learning opportunities across the state, nation, and world.”<sup>15</sup> Online learning positions Truman to network with partners in K-12 education and the corporate world, and further, positions us to reach as-yet-unforeseen audiences that would benefit from Truman’s public mission.

### **Alignment of Online Learning with Undergraduate Education**

This committee sees online learning’s role in undergraduate education as being primarily a means to stem the increasing disaggregation of the Truman degree. This plan *does not* envision a significant effort to grow online learning at the undergraduate level during the regular academic year. Instead, this plan sees online courses for undergraduates being made available during summer sessions and interim periods, and to potential transfer students, as a means for ensuring greater control over the content being learned by Truman majors and as a means for stemming the financial losses incurred by students taking required coursework from other institutions and transferring such courses to Truman. **The committee agrees that, ideally, Truman undergraduates would complete as many courses as possible in residence.** However, if the choice is between students taking their courses somewhere where we do not have some degree of control over course content, then transferring those credits here, and offering the courses online during the summer and having substantially greater control over the content students receive, we believe the online option is the superior option.

This said, this statement should not be construed to suggest that there may not be legitimate reasons for offering online courses to undergraduates during the regular academic year. We would observe that:

- Online courses offer the university an option to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act by retaining temporarily disabled faculty and offering them a way to continue to serve the institution even when physical presence on campus can be difficult. As the professoriate ages, periods of temporary

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<sup>11</sup> p. 2

<sup>12</sup> p. 3

<sup>13</sup> p. 3

<sup>14</sup> pp.4-6

<sup>15</sup> p. 9

disability will become potentially more and more disruptive to staffing patterns relying on the conventional on-campus model.

- Online courses offer the university an option for complying with the Family and Medical Leave Act. Faculty may be able to maintain their course responsibilities even when temporarily relocated to serve the health needs of eligible family members.
- Fall and spring semester online courses offer faculty in field-based courses or programs flexibility to use daytime hours for supervision of student experiences, and evening/weekend hours for providing a course.
- Fall and spring semester online courses offer students the flexibility to participate in daytime field experiences while still being able to complete coursework on time.

### **Alignment of Online Learning with Graduate Education**

The committee recognizes the vital role online learning is likely to play in any serious expansion of Truman's graduate offerings. Truman's geographic location, as well as the job market for students and partners in the surrounding community, makes significant graduate enrollments in new programs less and less likely if these programs are confined to the physical campus in Kirksville. While Truman undergraduates can continue to supply some graduate programs with students upon completion of the Bachelor's degree, Truman's limited graduate opportunities and assistantship/fellowship opportunities will limit traffic entering the institution from the outside. In keeping with national trends, the careful and strategic addition of online graduate degrees and/or graduate certificates is likely the best prospect for significant growth in graduate enrollment over the next decade – particularly at a time when overall graduate school enrollment is in decline.<sup>16</sup>

There are strong justifications for such a move on the graduate level. First, alumni and others currently employed outside of Kirksville will be able to remain lifelong learners and further the skills and knowledge gained during their undergraduate degrees while still remaining gainfully employed at a time of significant economic uncertainty. Second, distance education affords the opportunity for students to receive outstanding learning opportunities without relocating to Kirksville. Finally, online programs do not represent an added burden to current Truman faculty or facilities: by allowing for the hiring of additional faculty on an adjunct basis and unlimited as to location, online graduate education will allow for greater cost efficiency, infrastructure savings, and less strain on an already over-taxed faculty.

The impact that such courses can have on supporting Truman's growing national reputation as offering a high-quality education at a reasonable price cannot be overlooked. Without significant online graduate offerings, Truman relevance to alumni seeking further educational opportunities abruptly disappears upon graduation. However, when we enable alumni and other qualified students to engage in continuing, liberal arts and sciences education at the graduate level, we enhance Truman's ongoing relevance to students beyond their completed baccalaureate. In summary, online opportunities at the graduate level will enable Truman to maintain relationships with alumni while reaching out to serve new populations of graduate learners with the same high-quality education for which the institution is widely recognized.

### **Alignment of Online Learning with Continuing Education and Professional Development**

National trends in continuing education and professional development show a rapid shift to online delivery, owing largely to student demand and the nature of the current economy. Employers seeking continuing education and professional development opportunities for their employees can help their staff obtain valuable credentials while affording them the flexibility to continue their workday responsibilities. In particular, online

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<sup>16</sup> Rampell, Catherine. "Enrollment Drops Again in Graduate Programs." *New York Times* 28 September 2012. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/28/business/new-enrollment-drops-again-in-us-graduate-schools.html?\\_r=1&hp](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/28/business/new-enrollment-drops-again-in-us-graduate-schools.html?_r=1&hp)

professional development opportunities enable Truman alumni to maintain connections to faculty and obtain Truman-quality learning while causing minimal disruption to their jobs and lives.

### **Alignment of Online Learning with State and National Policy Goals**

At the same time the Department of Education is exerting greater scrutiny over online education providers, they are nonetheless underscoring the need for innovation in distance learning to bring education to more students. Indeed, executive branch policy statements on both the state and federal level have made it clear that colleges and universities need to be increasing the number of people with college degrees, improving completion rates, and exposing more Americans to at least some college coursework. Further, federal leaders have embraced far more radical approaches to distance learning – most notably open courseware and “badges” initiatives – that represent significant challenges to the traditional, credential-based, tuition-driven model of education. Thus, continued efforts to position Truman to handle more online students is not only in keeping with market demand, but in keeping with growth and innovation expectations from government and the exigencies created by competing delivery models.

### Statement of Goals for Fully Online Courses

The following section articulates broad goals and suggests specific actions to be taken to realize those goals. Where applicable, two documents are referenced in parenthesis as the impetus for specific recommendations. These are the “Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs” document developed by the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (CRAC) and the Western Cooperative for Educational Technologies (WCET) and the Assurances Document (committee recommendations) from the Higher Learning Commission’s spring 2011 site visit to Truman. The former document is typically referenced by institutions submitting institutional changes for online learning to various regional accrediting bodies. The latter articulates specific actions expected of Truman to improve its services in the area of online education. Both documents are included as appendices to this report. Each document is referenced below by its specific subsection standard or recommendation.

#### Broad Goals

- (9) Access to Truman-quality online courses should be improved for both Truman students needing summer coursework and non-Truman students interested in a Truman learning experience.
- (10) Faculty and administrators should make thoughtful efforts to identify and develop those courses which are truly appropriate for online delivery.
- (11) Efforts should be strengthened to ensure that online course offerings are of consistently high quality and in keeping with nationally-established best practices.
- (12) Support services for students enrolled in online courses should be substantially improved.
- (13) Faculty development opportunities should be expanded and support resources should be improved.
- (14) Policies relevant to teaching in the online environment should be periodically reviewed (or new ones created) to keep policies consistent with best practices in online learning.
- (15) Online courses should be subjected to improved assessment strategies reflective of the exigencies of teaching at a distance.
- (16) Infrastructure and oversight should be improved to provide necessary support for distance learning.

## Strategies and Objectives

***Access to Truman-quality online courses should be improved for both Truman students needing summer coursework and non-Truman students interested in a Truman learning experience.***

- The University should work to ensure that every department possible has at least one fully online course available to students during the summer, recognizing that some disciplines employ pedagogies that lack a convenient virtual equivalent.

Recent attempts to ascertain the nature of the courses students seek in the summer reveal an interest in students obtaining courses in their major during the summer. While courses in the LSP remain strongly desired by students, survey respondents indicate they would first prefer major courses, if available. Naturally, not all departments will be able to supply an online course in their content area, as some disciplines demand face-to-face interaction by the nature of their work. This said, a number of institutions have developed innovative tools for delivering content in some of these areas, either online, or by limited face-to-face components in a hybrid (yet mostly online) course. Ultimately, to the extent departments can innovate with fully-online or largely-online blended course, such a strategy will expand options and enhance diversity of programs.

- The University should increase the number of fully online courses offered during the summer in the Liberal Studies Program (LSP).

While students indicate a preference for major courses in the summer, courses in the Liberal Studies Program are a close second. These courses not only serve our own students and the timely completion of their degrees, but they also represent a category of courses students would most likely seek elsewhere during the summer, and attempt to transfer back to Truman. Thus, LSP courses represent the most “vulnerable” place in Truman’s catalog where students might transfer those credits from elsewhere. Developing a range of options among LSP courses is probably Truman’s best option for reducing transfers of general education content from elsewhere and focusing students’ on-campus attention on their major. Offering LSP courses online may also address another of Truman’s current challenges, that is, the placement of enrollment caps on LSP courses due to faculty attrition. Some strategies may be employed in an online course that result in the ability to increase enrollment caps, allowing more students into these courses required for their major field of study.

- The University should increase the number of professional development and elective courses offered online to meet the needs to external audiences and students wishing to add value to their existing degree programs. Such coursework could include stand-alone courses, graduate certificates, or fully-online degree or degree completion programs.

Because of Truman’s location, expansion of professional development and graduate offerings to Truman alumni, or to individuals already employed, will necessitate increased use of technology. The market increasingly expects the availability of such courses to provide flexibility to students.

- The University should target for development courses in areas where other Missouri institutions do not offer online opportunities or where demand outstrips supply at their home institutions.

Just as at Truman, there are certain courses or requirements students struggle to complete in a timely fashion on their home campuses. Marketing research should attempt to isolate such demand areas and, where possible, look for synergy with needs of students on our own campus.

- The University should take the necessary steps to ensure that students admitted to, or registering for, online courses or programs are sufficiently prepared for, and sufficiently aware of, the unique needs of the student in an online classroom (WCET “Best Practices” 4b).

Appropriate campus offices need to make available abundant information on the nature of online learning, self-assessment tools, and live counseling, so that prospective students can make informed decisions. Applications to online programs should be scrutinized for indicators that a student may not be prepared for the rigors or structure of an online course or program.

- The University should seek to attain levels of retention and student performance for fully online courses and programs comparable to that of traditional, in-seat courses.

Online institutions, particularly in the for-profit sector, have been dogged by accusations that they recruit students to online courses and programs to capture tuition or student aid dollars, but then do not provide the necessary support to ensure retention of students in these programs. Truman’s initial focus should be on offering individual online courses to its traditional face-to-face students. However, should Truman expand its fully-online program offerings, significant attention must be given to identifying students who are struggling in the online environment so as to provide them the added support needed to succeed.

***Faculty and administrators should make thoughtful efforts to identify and develop those courses which are truly appropriate for online delivery.***

- The University should work with schools and departments to identify courses that are appropriate for online delivery (WCET “Best Practices” 1i, 2b).

Departments and schools should remain in the “driver’s seat” when it comes to identifying and approving courses for offering online. Their faculties should be comfortable with the choice and prepared to provide the necessary oversight of course development and outcomes fulfillment. Part of being able to identify new possibilities, however, is having an awareness of advances in instructional technology, and what other institutions are doing to bring new subjects into the online arena. Appropriate units such as the Truman Institute, the Graduate School, Learning Technologies, and the campus’ various faculty development initiatives, should have the responsibility of continually updating faculty on advances in technology and what can be achieved digitally so that they are better prepared to identify possible offerings.

Additionally, the University’s professional staff should be encouraged to lend their own expertise, where appropriate, to the identification and development of online offerings that may serve non-traditional audiences seeking professional development in certain niche fields.

- The University should work with schools and departments to conduct needs assessments and demand analysis to establish viability of new online courses in targeted areas (WCET “Best Practices” 1c).

Courses should be converted to online formats based on a demonstrated or firmly believed need. Schools and departments should be intimately involved in the process of assessing the viability of courses for their own students or for new audiences.

- The University should incentivize faculty involvement in the development of online courses through summer grants and competitive compensation (WCET “Best Practices” 3a).

Faculty development of fully online courses should be appropriately incentivized, using a two-pronged approach. First, the institutionalization of a course development grants process wherein courses are developed and evaluated in the summer preceding their launch as a regular Truman course. Such grants would be conditioned on the timely completion of a course “shell,” attendance at professional development activities for the faculty member’s skill level, and evaluation by the appropriate bodies (including faculty governance, if necessary). The availability of such grants would be based on demand for online courses and faculty would need to demonstrate the student/market need for their particular course to be eligible for grants. Second, for those faculty who are not yet ready to commit to teaching an online course, offer intensive professional development activities for them to explore opportunities and options. This intensive training should be offered during the summer or interim timeframes.

- Truman should investigate the student/public need and/or advantages of developing and implementing Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and digital “badges.”

The educational marketplace has been flooded, in a very short period of time, by “open courseware.” These courses are available online, are free, and are provided by some of the world’s leading institutions of higher learning, including Harvard, UC Berkeley, MIT, Michigan, and others. These open courses take a variety of forms, ranging from scheduled Massively Open Online Courses (with enrollments of thousands of students) to on-demand lectures and mini-courses. Numerous start-up companies have formed to organize these courses, including consortia of universities. Gradually, both universities and private entities are learning to monetize these experiences by offering transfer credit, digital “badges,”<sup>17</sup> or low-cost completion certificates. Aimed primarily at a non-traditional, non-matriculated market of users, these programs have the combined benefit of serving institutions’ public missions while elevating the brand recognition of the institution providing the content.

The introduction of open courseware into the marketplace has been characterized by many as a “game changer” in higher education. As costs for education rise, and employers become more focused on hiring for specific skill sets than for broad education, there is legitimate concern that a tectonic shift in how we think about learning and credentialing may be about to occur. Even the U.S. Department of Education has become an active advocate of these options.<sup>18</sup> Moody’s Investment Service recently warned that colleges and universities – small and private or regional institutions – could face a loss in market share simply as a result of competition from these alternatives.<sup>19</sup>

It is in Truman’s interest to explore these opportunities for serving external markets and elevating brand recognition. Such alternatives do not impact the core mission of the institution, but potentially position Truman to remain competitive in an emerging marketplace should predictions about its impact come to fruition.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://wiki.mozilla.org/Badges>

<sup>18</sup> Duncan, Arne. “Digital Badges for Learning: Remarks by Secretary Duncan at 4th Annual Launch of the MacArthur Foundation Digital Media and Lifelong Learning Competition.” 15 September 2011. <http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/digital-badges-learning>

<sup>19</sup> Head, Sarah King. “MOOCs: The Revolution has begun, says Moody’s.” 23 September 2012. <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20120920124146236>

***Efforts should be strengthened to ensure that online course offerings are of consistently high quality and in keeping with nationally established best practices.***

- Procedures for faculty approval, faculty governance review, and post-implementation assessment should be reviewed, updated, and then consistently applied to all new offerings (WCET “Best Practices” 2b; HLC “Assurance” B15).

Faculty governance has an important role to play in the implementation of any expanded offerings of online education. However, given the need for timely review of what could be a substantial number of new courses, and given the need for appropriate degrees of autonomy for individual departments and faculty in their paths to the same course objective, it may not always be appropriate or efficient to review every course that is converted from face-to-face to online delivery, particularly if that conversion is only intended for summer offerings. We would encourage faculty governance to review its approval processes and discuss whether any modifications are needed. Once such a review is completed, expectations for review should be clearly articulated to the University community and consistently adhered to.

- Assessment strategies should be developed that take into account the inherent differences between teaching in face-to-face and online environments. These new strategies should be implemented with an eye toward assessing both the effectiveness of the instructor, as well as the effectiveness of the delivery modality (WCET “Best Practices” 1i).

Truman’s current assessment strategies – particularly the student evaluations of faculty – are firmly grounded in the face-to-face delivery mode. Assessment tools need to be adapted to consider the unique exigencies of teaching in the online environment. Such tools are critical to providing the professors for online and blended courses the appropriate level of feedback.

- The University should adopt nationally-accepted quality rubrics, such as those promoted by the Sloan Consortium, Quality Matters, and similar organizations and initiatives, to help ensure that online offerings are built consistent with contemporary best practices (HLC “Assurances” A12).

While Truman has already become involved with the Quality Matters program, Truman should continue to develop its own professional development efforts to help faculty review their courses and meet the quality standards represented by these rubrics.

***Support services for students enrolled in online courses should be substantially improved.***

- Student services historically designed for face-to-face learners must be adapted to serve the needs of distance learners (WCET “Best Practices” 1e, 1j, 4a, 4b, 4c).

As a growing number of students not located in Kirksville begin taking Truman courses, it will become necessary to adapt services that have historically been face-to-face to do business online and by phone. Such services will include, but are not necessarily limited to, the Business Office, the Registrar, Student Accounts, Financial Aid, and Disability Services, as well as access to library and database resources.

- Disability services need to be adapted to be proactive, rather than reactive, with respect to the needs of online learners (WCET “Best Practices” 1j, 4c).

Truman will need to ensure “reasonable accommodations” (as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act) are addressed with respect to disabilities and online courses. Increased traffic in these courses increases the likelihood that students will require services such as captioning, blind-accessible applications, etc., and Truman needs to be prepared to address these issues.

- Technological support needs to be made available at times which respect the unique schedules of online learners (WCET “Best Practices” 1h, 4b, 4c).

Student services need to be adapted to meet the needs of online students. At present our IT Help Desk confines its hours to those of the Library. Online learning, however, occurs at all hours of the day or night – and in different time zones. In order to provide reliable service and support to students taking online courses, the University will need to improve self-service tools to fill the gap when live personnel are unavailable, and should consider alternative support schedules based on the time of the semester.

The Association of College and Research Libraries recognizes the need to provide direct human access to the distance learning community through instruction, interaction and intervention from library personnel in the provision of library services and in facilitating successful use of library resources. Services must be designed to meet a wide range of user needs, including some form of direct user access to library personnel. In addition, the institution must provide or secure convenient and direct access to library material in appropriate format and of sufficient quantity. Truman’s Pickler Library has recently added 80,000 titles to the online e-book collection, and has expanded the JSTOR full-text databases as well. These enhancements frame strong support for distance education, with more electronic resources being added all the time.

- When and if fully online programs develop on campus, distance learners should be provided with representation in the appropriate student governance bodies at the University (WCET “Best Practices” 4d).  
At present, Student Senate lacks representation for non-traditional students, particularly those who participate in the University’s life at a distance. The Student Senate should be encouraged to create a vehicle for such representation on their body. Where appropriate, committees and other groups that seek area-specific student input should encourage representation from online students.

***Faculty development opportunities should be expanded and support resources should be improved.***

- All faculty teaching online courses should be required to take a course in teaching for the online environment before teaching online for Truman (WCET “Best Practices” 3b, 3c, 3d).

Effective training is critical to the delivery of meaningful online learning. Pedagogy in an online environment is distinctly different from pedagogy in a face-to-face environment. Faculty need appropriate professional development and support to engage in online instruction (whether they are teaching online for the first time, or enhancing their skills). We recommend that Truman continue its involvement with the Quality Matters program. Further, Truman should continue to require all its instructors who want to teach online to have completed an appropriate training course – either through Truman’s Learning Technologies Team, or through approved external providers. Continuous professional development opportunities should be offered on a regular-enough basis to ensure that faculty remain current in the best practices for teaching online.

- Veteran online teachers should be afforded routine professional development opportunities to remain current on educational technology (WCET “Best Practices” 3b, 3c, 3d).

This recommendation acknowledges the fact that technology is rapidly changing. Instructors who began teaching online a decade ago, but have not sought additional faculty development, may find that they are no longer employing the most effective technologies – or ones with which the majority of students are familiar. In order to keep faculty current, efforts should be made to maximize faculty participation in routine development and retraining efforts.

***Policies relevant to teaching in the online environment should be periodically reviewed (or new ones created) to keep policies consistent with best practices in online learning.***

- Policies pertaining to online education should be reviewed with the support of a steering committee composed of faculty, administrators, information technology personnel, and appropriate students. This committee should be further charged with evaluating the consistency of online offerings with the University mission and vision (WCET “Best Practices” 3a; HLC “Assurances” B14, B15).

Both CRAC/WCET and the Higher Learning Commission have affirmed what this committee already believes, that continued involvement from the University community is needed as policies respecting online learning are developed, implemented, and revised.

- The policy on intellectual property should be appropriately published and reviewed so faculty are fully aware of their rights with respect to online course materials. (WCET “Best Practices” 3a).

Truman’s policy on intellectual property rights (Chapter V of the Faculty Handbook) discusses ownership rights for copyrights as well as inventions and patents, essentially defining “joint ownership” to be an equitable division between the individual and the University based on the value of the respective contribution, unless otherwise agreed upon in writing. This joint ownership results when the copyright or invention was created from materials developed by employees utilizing University time, resources or equipment.

With respect to online course materials, intellectual property rights are more complicated due to the nature of how these materials are electronically created, stored and presented. For online courses meeting the definition of joint ownership (i.e., developed utilizing University time, resources or equipment), Truman would hold that the University maintains the right to use the course materials as well as to offer the course. Additionally, Truman may continue to offer that content online, under the leadership of other qualified faculty, into perpetuity. The University would also retain the right to alter the course in any way it sees fit. Likewise, the faculty member developing the course would also retain the right to take with them all course content developed while employed by the University to deploy elsewhere once they have severed their ties to the University. The faculty member would not, however, have the right to offer the course at another institution while still employed at the University, nor would they be permitted to offer the course elsewhere until the course had first been available for course registration at Truman.

It is important to note that during the development of this document, it became clear that there is not agreement on Truman’s standard practices regarding intellectual property rights. It is recommended, therefore, that the current policy (including the above-mentioned recommendation) be reviewed and modified if necessary to more clearly outline intellectual property rights, including policy specifics related to face-to-face, online, and blended courses.

- Policies pertaining to the ethical management of online courses, the intellectual property of third parties, student privacy, distinct student services, and other topics of unique significance to the online environment should be made readily available to students, faculty, and staff, as appropriate. (WCET “Best Practices” 1j, 3a, 3b)

The University should take all appropriate steps to train online instructors in the best practices for the protection of intellectual property rights in an online environment. Policies regarding intellectual property should be made readily available to faculty and students. Efforts should be extended to make all parties aware of the materials available at <http://copyright.truman.edu> and similar resources internal and external resources. While basic principles with respect to intellectual property have not changed for many years, the state of intellectual property case law continues to evolve. A great deal of confusion exists about concepts such as “fair use.” Faculty, staff, and students would benefit greatly from continued access to updated information on these principles.

Additionally, students, faculty, and staff need to be readily aware of those policies and services that uniquely impact learning in an online environment or the needs of the online learner, such as the services of the IT Help Desk and Disability Services.

***Online courses should be subjected to improved assessment strategies reflective of the exigencies of teaching at a distance.***

- An assessment plan for online courses and programs should be adopted (HLC “Assurances” B16).

While a very limited assessment plan was presented to the Higher Learning Commission for the purposes of launching Truman’s first fully online graduate certificates, it is recommended that a more permanent assessment plan be developed and implemented in consultation with the University’s Assessment Committee.

- Assessment tools should be developed that respect the unique differences between face-to-face, blended, and fully online courses (WCET “Best Practices” 2a; HLC “Assurances” B16).

Like any new or developing tool, online learning should be continuously assessed for its effectiveness. The committee recommends the development of a distinct course evaluation with questions reflective of the unique needs of the student in an online environment, taking advantage of the expertise of those faculty already teaching successfully in an online environment. Additionally, the committee recommends that the University’s Assessment Committee continue to explore ways in which other assessment data might explore differences in learning accomplished by different modes of delivery.

- Efforts should be made to use assessment tools to compare like sections in online and non-online environments as a basis for establishing whether significant differences in student performance are observable (WCET “Best Practices” 2a; HLC “Assurances” B16).

While research has now firmly established that online and blended learning is at least as effective (if not sometimes slightly more effective) than face-to-face learning at achieving

planned learning outcomes,<sup>20</sup> significant doubt remains in the minds of many faculty, administrators, and students alike. This doubt is understandable, given that any modality of course delivery can be more or less effective because of how it is delivered, who delivers it, and whether they are adequately prepared to do so. One must also consider that summer school students could be different from regular year students in important ways as well (GPA, probation status, outside work schedules, etc.). Where possible, Truman's assessment plan should seek to determine whether differences in learning exist between strictly face-to-face sections, online sections, and blended sections of multi-section courses.

- Students in online courses should be regularly surveyed about service functions of the University as they pertain to online courses and whether those functions adequately meet their needs in a virtual environment. (WCET "Best Practices" 2a; HLC "Assurances" B16).

It is essential that Truman students in online courses receive access to student services and resources that are comparable to that of face-to-face Truman students. Surveys are one tool Truman may employ to help evaluate its effectiveness at achieving that objective.

- Where they exist, fully or largely online programs should be regularly assessed based on performance indicators such as completion rates, student satisfaction, job placement or advancement, and employer feedback (WCET "Best Practices" 2a; HLC "Assurances" B16).

National policies are increasingly pressuring colleges and universities to establish whether or not their programs are helping with job placement. Moreover, regional and federal authorities are increasingly troubled by retention problems in online programs. Truman should take the necessary steps to make sure its programs are delivering the added value their promise and that students are satisfied with their learning experiences.

***Infrastructure and oversight should be improved to provide necessary support for distance learning.*** (WCET "Best Practices" 1d)

- A central location in University administration should be identified with the task of managing online course development and assessment, professional development, and technical support, as well as the review and enforcement of policies pertaining to online education at the University. This office should also be responsible for monitoring the University's compliance with state, regional, and national accreditation expectations with respect to distance learning (WCET "Best Practices" 1c; HLC "Assurances" A9, A10, A11, A13, B14, B15)

The Higher Learning Commission's review team indicated in 2011 that they believed greater centralization of the management of online courses and programs was needed. While they did not identify a specific home, they suggested in multiple points that such coordination was warranted.

- The University should undertake periodic reviews of its Learning Management System to determine whether optimal services are being obtained at a cost that is justifiable to the institution (WCET "Best Practices" 1g, 1i).

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<sup>20</sup> U.S. Department of Education. "Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning: A Meta-Analysis and Review of Online Learning Studies." September 2010. <http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/tech/evidence-based-practices/finalreport.pdf>

The marketing for learning management systems is evolving with corporate consolidation being the name of the day. Both expensive packages and open source resources are available to facilitate online courses. Truman should regularly review the tools available to it to ensure that it is getting the optimal benefit for its investment.

- The University should *thoughtfully* expand the infrastructure necessary to capture, edit, and enhance audio, video, and other content for online distribution.

Truman has taken several positive steps in recent years to make its blended and online courses more dynamic through the inclusion of video, audio, and other interactive content. As these technologies become more plentiful and advanced, the University should seek to remain current and competitive in the tools its students and faculty might employ, keeping in mind the resources required for continued adequate support.

- The University should invest in more personnel to support the development of online courses and the support for faculty professional development in the area of distance learning.

An expansion of online courses requires sufficient personnel support. At present, Truman's instructional design services are limited. Additional instructional designers, instructional technologists, and/or faculty development specialists must be an essential component of any meaningful expansion of online learning at Truman.

**Appendixes**