

Summary and Recommendations of the Online Education Strategy Planning Team

I was privileged to chair the Online Education Strategy Planning Team during the spring of 2016. Provost Ott Rowlands charged the Task Force with assessing the adequacy of existing resources (including personnel and operating budgets) to meet current and future needs in online education at NKU. Team members engaged in spirited and probing dialogue in an effort to explore existing resources for online education at NKU.

As noted in the "Northern Kentucky University Online and Learning Technology Task Force Report" (May 2015), the University is experiencing declining enrollment in traditional student populations. Growth in online education attracts nontraditional adult learners and, as such, has been a goal of the University for several years. Limited success in the strengthening of online programs at NKU is attributed to the lack of a coordinated effort and insufficient resources (May 2015). "While various support units have been created to meet these needs, lack of structure and commitment have led to uneven results" (May 2015).

The Online and Learning Technology Task Force further asserted that online education at Northern Kentucky University is critical to the future of the institution. By virtue of rapid advances in technology and change within our student profile, NKU is well positioned to deliver high quality higher education to students across the Commonwealth, nation, and world. Effective use of technology will enable NKU to deliver programs that address the needs of business partners and global markets while also providing a catalyst for the institution to connect/reconnect with alumni.

The re-envisioning of online learning at NKU offers the opportunity to recruit new learners to the University community and to improve services to existing students. Because the landscape of online education can change so quickly, we must use evidence acquired through assessment, satisfaction, and other measures of student outcomes to drive objective decision-making.

The potential benefits of an expansion of online learning at NKU extend beyond institutional growth and revenue. This kind of progress will enable NKU to create an environment that is increasingly relevant and attractive with long-term value to our students at local, regional, and national levels. Additional resources to support online education and directly enable faculty to deliver high quality, technology-enhanced student learning experiences will extend or amplify the value of the resources to all aspects of learning at the University. Additionally, online education provides apt opportunity for institutional collaboration and the facilitation of faculty partnerships required in the delivery of high caliber student learning experiences enhanced by technology.

Online education goals mirror strategies articulated to actualize NKU's Strategic Plan. Our reconceptualization of online education represents a cultural shift with an emphasis on key factors that will strengthen the future of the University.

To effectively and efficiently function in a highly competitive online environment, providing first-rate support for faculty and delivering the highest quality of learner-centric experiences requires a level of resource support not currently available at the University. Allocating resources critical to responsibly growing online education demands resources that NKU is not positioned to fund at present.

Recommendation:

All members of the Online Education Strategy Planning Team agree that if NKU expects to use online education to diversify revenue streams in order to improve the financial outlook of the University, it is necessary to explore the option of entering a relationship with an external partner able to provide expertise in online education throughout the lifecycle of the student.

Respectfully submitted,

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