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Blackboard learn⁺_{TM}

University of South Florida St. Petersburg

Expanded Presence Capabilities Analysis – Executive Summary

February 18, 2011

Prepared by:

Karen Yoshino, Senior Consultant

Paul Bowers, Senior Consultant

Matt Seeberg, Project Manager



Blackboard

Consulting

University of South Florida St. Petersburg Expanded Presence Capabilities Analysis Executive Highlights

The purpose of this document is to highlight important strategies of high priority that will likely require significant executive attention and are critical to the potential success of online learning efforts at USFSP. The full report contains detailed findings and over 40 recommendations in the eight effective practice areas. The most critical recommendations are surfaced here with a high level rationale to underscore their importance as a springboard for further discussion. We have highlighted recommendations in three key areas: Institutional Strategy, Organizational and Financial Model, and the Learning Environment.

1. Institutional Strategy

Institutional Strategy Findings

- Online Learning is not strongly represented in the current strategic plan.
- An explicit vision and goals for online learning have not been formally articulated and tied to strategic plan, mission, and institutional priorities.
- A steering team has been put into place, but without a clearly articulated charter.
- Executive leadership is strongly evident but decision-making seems to be reactive and ad-hoc absent a clear plan.

Institutional Strategy Recommended Goal:

Distance learning at USFSP is guided by clear goals and outcomes, with decisions of leaders and governing bodies and the actions of programs and faculty aligning to those goals to achieve the desired results in terms of growth, quality, and cost-effectiveness.

Leadership Recommendations:

- **Establish and document the vision and alignment to mission in a formal charter document**
- **Establish a governance structure with clearly defined roles and responsibilities**
- **Articulate specific goals and targets for outcomes of the online learning initiative including the desired rate and type of growth**
- **Determine an approach for change management that uses ongoing communication and obtains feedback with key stakeholders about the initiative**

Key Risks:

These risks exist and may contribute to the online learning program not gaining acceptance or achieving desired goals.

- Online activity not aligned with institutional mission, strategy, and goals
- Ad-hoc development as opposed to strategic growth and consistent quality
- Lack of faculty and other stakeholder buy-in
- Goals potentially conflict with other strategic directions for the campus, especially effort to build a campus-based student population and experience
- Low return on investment and return on value

2. Organizational and Financial Model

Select Organizational and Financial Findings

- Revenues and expenses for online learning are not directly related in a formalized budget.
- A clear resource plan based on strategic goals has not been developed; spending appears to be ad-hoc and not according to defined plan.
- Online learning lacks an experienced leader with primary responsibility to manage strategic direction and operations for online learning.
- The organizational model for online learning at USFSP is currently emerging as a departmental- or college-centered approach, leading to duplication of effort and inefficiencies in the use of staff and provision of services.

Organizational and Financial Recommended Goal:

Online programs at USFSP are supported by a sustainable financial plan that tracks the connection between expenses and revenues, and by an organizational model that provides effective and efficient operations and support.

Leadership Recommendations:

- **Establish a Revenue and Expense Model**
- **Establish a 3-5 year Financial Plan that projects online costs against projected revenues**
- **Establish an Organizational Framework :**
 - **Establish a position for Director of Distance Learning** with the chief responsibility to grow and develop new programs in partnership with College and Departments. Locate this office within the Library to provide centrally coordinated support services for distance learning. There is currently a trend toward certain Colleges and programs developing their own support processes, resources, and even staffing. This approach will promote duplication of effort and cost, reduce program and service consistency affecting the student experience, and reduce overall strategic impact for the University

as a whole. At present the Library represents the most neutral “turf” from which to build inter-departmental collaboration and provide consistent, well supported services for distance learning.

- **Engage a formal review and analysis of organizational models** at peer and aspirant institutions successful with online learning and adopt a plan to develop a distance learning organizational and financial model that can scale for growth in the future. This effort especially will be important to resolve territorial issues and build a collaborative, coordinated model for developing distance learning programs.
- **Draft a charter for this new department** to include roles and responsibilities of this office to coordinate online learning efforts.
- **Revise the course development RFP process** to focus on development of programs and course clusters based on strategic goals with stricter requirements for participation.

Key Risks:

These risks exist and may contribute to the online learning program not gaining acceptance or achieving desired goals.

- Ad-hoc, uncoordinated efforts not aligned fully with strategic goals
- Inconsistent course and program quality and delivery management
- Inefficient processes and unnecessary duplication leading to higher costs and lower ROI
- Lack of leadership and direction to sustain efforts
- Lower enrollment, retention, and program completion overall
- Failure to attract significant numbers of new students; shifting delivery modes for current students thus raising costs
- Inability to effectively compete with other providers
- Inconsistent support for faculty and students; faculty and student dissatisfaction

3. Learning Environment

Select Learning Environment Findings

- Both the Blackboard Learn environment (LMS) and Student Information System (SIS) are hosted in a single instance for the USF system by Information Services in Tampa.
 - This hosting arrangement limits flexibility and functionality in both the SIS and LMS.
 - This arrangement is not scalable to meet the needs of the USFSP campus for online learning growth.

Learning Environment Recommended Goal:

The distance learning platform at USFSP provides effective integration with student information systems, support for a variety of teaching and learning technologies, system stability and scalability, and technology support services sufficient to meet the growth and quality goals for online learning.

Leadership Recommendations:

- **Develop a plan for the Learning Environment with detailed specifications for current and future functionality, support, integration with student records, and maintenance**
- **Develop a plan for separate instances of both the Student Information System (SIS) and Learning Management System (LMS) for USFSP**

Key Risks:

These risks exist and may contribute to the online learning program not gaining acceptance or achieving desired goals.

The current shared hosting model contributes to the risks for the USFSP program:

- Continued limitation for USFSP distance learning in terms of:
 - Cost efficiency and scalability of operations
 - Course and delivery quality
 - Student and faculty user experience
 - Data analytics and student progress and retention strategies
 - Support for emerging technologies and third party applications
 - Competitive position relative to other providers
 - USFSP branding
- Lack of control over costs and service metrics
- Limitations on technical support for faculty and students
- Inability to maintain positive momentum and faculty enthusiasm for distance learning