INITIAL REPORT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI‘I`S TASK FORCE ON TECHNOLOGY & DISTANCE LEARNING

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Successful d-learning has little to do with the technology and everything to do with people.

INTRODUCTION

In July 2001, President Dobelle appointed UH Hilo Chancellor Rose Tseng as his Senior Advisor on Technology & Distance Learning, and charged her with (a) to integrate and leverage our efforts, while expanding them to meet both unmet demand for distance learning and untapped possibilities, and (b) to develop a systemwide plan for technology and distance learning. The following is a report of achievements and actions with overall conclusions of each area, and concludes with recommendations. This report covers approximately five months of work and continues to be an evolving and on-going process.

I. ASSESS INSTITUTIONAL READINESS

Following the charge, many meetings and appointments with existing stakeholders and existing units at UH took place. In addition to discussions with the President, these included, formal and informal meetings with all four chancellors (Manoa, West Oahu and the Community Colleges), the chair of and the Master Scheduling Group of representatives from all the units including the University Centers, the director of Information Technology Services, the chair of the Manoa Distance Learning Committee, the chair of Information and Computer Sciences, and the dean of the Outreach College.

Additionally, existing UH documents, draft reports and policies on technology and distance learning were reviewed.

Overall conclusion: There is a critical need for top leadership to bring about the coordination and collaboration essential to designing a successful systemwide strategic direction/plan for technology and distance learning.

II. STUDY OTHER INSTITUTIONS, NATIONAL TRENDS, AND INTERNATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Concurrently with assessing institutional readiness, were conversations with other institutions in the United States, the United Kingdom, and China, which are involved in distance learning. Common institutional challenges emerged from these conversations. Additionally, participation at several conferences, including a meeting with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) reaffirmed the overall conclusions that have been emerging from discussions with various administrators, faculty and staff who have had first-hand experiences with technology and distance learning.

Overall conclusion: Success is directly related to a focused approach, knowing where and how to direct time and energies. Distance learning needs to be embedded in the overall goals of the university. Distance learning is an expensive but critical investment that one cannot afford to ignore.

III. APPOINT A UNIVERSITY TASK FORCE

In September efforts commenced to appoint a University Task Force. To assist with the appointment, chancellors were asked to recommend one person from their respective unit (Manoa, Hilo, West Oahu and the Community Colleges). Selected members external to the university were also invited to serve on the Task Force.

Purposes of the Task Force:

1. To advise the University of Hawai‘i on directions to achieve global competitiveness in technology and distance learning.
2. To assist with establishing entrepreneurial and strategic alliances.
3. To assist with resource development.
4. To increase the overall image and stature of the University of Hawai‘i.

Overall conclusion: The composition of both internal (university) and external members from industry would promote thinking out-of-the-box together with the degree of change that can be achieved, and the future applicability and relevancy of the strategic direction for our University.

IV. APPOINT COMMITTEES ON TECHNOLOGY & DISTANCE LEARNING

Committees and chairs of committees (Information Technology and Network Infrastructure, Distance Learning Model Programs and Proposal for Future Distance Learning Programs, Faculty Development & Training, UH Retreat on Distance Learning, Marketing & Public Relations, Resource/Grant Development and Partnership, and Quality Control) were appointed to continue with the operational tasks in each respective area. Committee membership was designed to be voluntary, open and fluid. All those presently working in the areas, as well as those who would like to work in the areas were invited to participate.

Overall conclusions:

(a) The need to determine and implement a new systemwide Anext generation SIS.

(b) The importance of meaningfully recognizing ongoing distance learning programs, as we look towards designing future distance learning programs.

(c) The importance of faculty development and training, together with incentives and institutional recognition of faculty.

(d) The significance of a bottom-up approach in balance with administrative leadership.

(e) The importance of determining the product, packaging and marketing the product early.

(f) The role of external funds via private gifts, state and/or federal funding, and partnerships to maximize university resources.

(f) On-going assessment for the best quality programs.

V. CREATE A SYSTEMWIDE EVENT ON DISTANCE LEARNING - DISTANCE EDUCATION LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP

The Retreat Committee designed a three-part retreat (which was subsequently renamed as workshop rather than retreat). The first workshop was held on November 28, 2001. Invitees were selected from faculty and administrators from across the campuses, and totaled about 150. The content of the workshop was designed by the Committee with assistance from the program manager of the Spark M. Matsunaga Institute for Peace and her team of facilitators.

The outcomes of the workshop are presently being summarized but the overall conclusions based on comments received at the end of the evening were very positive. Participants commented that this was the first time that this number of persons both faculty and

administrators, gathered from across the campuses to collectively focus and work on the mission and identify strategies and strategic issues. This was by invitation and not mandatory event, but more than 100 persons chose to participate, worked conscientiously, and engaged themselves with one another in the dialogue. The workshop engendered a feeling of openness, optimism and opportunity.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS and NEXT STEPS

The recommendations that follow are in various stages of progress and development:

- Recommendation 1: To completely convert the present student information systems among the units to the new next generation systemwide student information system.

Although there has been considerable reports and recommendations on SIS, substantive system action has not occurred until recently, when a Request for Information (RFI) for the SIS Project was initiated. The deadline for the RFI was November 30, with intensive review to take place the first week of December, and decision-making by top leadership to follow shortly thereafter. The adoption and implementation of a new systemwide SIS will be a major achievement and a critical component to the successful implementation of a systemwide distance education program at the University of Hawai‘i.

- Recommendation 2: To design and implement a new technology and distance learning organizational structure that is complementary to the overall UH organizational structure, and facilitates UH’s technology and distance education strategic directions.

The charge from President Dobelle, the evolving changes in administrative organization, and the needs of the institution, motivate the reexamination and reassessment of the existing structures of organization. In the very near future, organizational structure may be proposed, and to do this a related recommendation is to seek a consultant to assist with this seemingly simple yet complex process.

- Recommendation 3: To determine the product, and successfully package and market it to Hawai‘i and beyond.

Discussions on defining our distance education program are in infancy and require maturation. Should we concentrate on UH’s special niches, and if so, what are they? Should our program be market-driven, or a combination there-of? Should we concentrate on degrees, certificates or courses? Is the program totally dependent on the interest and/or willingness of the faculty, or do we define the program then seek the appropriate faculty? Once again, a consultant is recommended to help untangle and refocus existing

perceptions and beliefs. The goal is to define the UH distance learning program and design successful marketing strategies.

- Recommendation 4. To secure external funds via private gifts, state and/or federal funding and to forge partnerships to maximize UH's financial and human capacities.

We have already achieved important inroads for example with our UH Foundation, the military (Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges), Sloan Foundation, a federal initiative and others. Additionally, we have had initial discussions with the China Hawaii Investment Corporation. President Dobelle has overviewed the proposal and recommended that we continue to engage in conversations for further development. External funds and partnerships will generate the start-up revenues to successfully launch our initiatives, and at the same time position ourselves for competitiveness and sustainability.

- Recommendation 5: To develop and implement a comprehensive and systematic program for faculty development and training, and to develop and implement process and procedures for institutional faculty incentives/rewards for their work in distance education.

Faculty are the heartbeat of a successful distance education program. Thus an investment in a comprehensive and systematic program is an investment in a successful distance education program. University of Hawai‘i must address and make transparent its institutional commitment to faculty incentives/rewards for participation in distance education.

- Recommendation 6: Distance Education is complementary to traditional instruction. While there may be some policies and procedures distinct to distance education, wherever possible, policies and procedures must be integrated into the total university culture of delivery of instruction.

Without reinventing the wheel, existing policies and documents need to be reexamined, appropriately revised, and officially approved as working guidelines. The change in presidency and the addition of new administrators create opportunities for a new beginning. Clarification and collaboration of our working guidelines will coordinate and focus our strategic directions in distance education.

- Recommendation 7: Continue with the collaborative bottom-up approach in balance with administrative leadership. The caveat, however, is that leadership must be astute and decisive in knowing when and how to execute decisions.

Phase I, Assess Institutional Readiness is near completion. We have a wealth of valuable experience, ideas and documents on distance education. The University Task Force formulated the overall mission and goals for technology and distance learning at UH. Using that as a framework, the Distance Education Leadership Workshop worked to refine the broad goals into specific and measurable objectives (results are being summarized and will be available shortly). Administrative leadership must now scrutinize, sift and select elements to begin the next step, Phase II, Design Strategic Directions.

CONCLUSION

Over the past few months positive momentum has been achieved. There is heightened genuine administrative acknowledgment of present and on-going efforts in technology and distance learning, a greater degree of collaboration between and among university units, increased dialogue between and among administrators and faculty, and articulated optimism and excitement for meaningful change.

University of Hawai‘i exhibits positive readiness to expand delivery of quality educational opportunities through distance education, boost its global competitiveness, and strengthen its overall image and stature.

This report has been prepared by Audrey S. Furukawa, Executive Director, University Task Force.