



WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY



*Request for Institutional Change:  
Distance Delivery of Selected Degree Programs*

2007 Higher Learning Commission



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# Request for Institutional Change

## Distance Delivery of Degree Programs<sup>CR.0</sup>

**CR.0** Resources Supporting Change Request  
<http://webs.wichita.edu/?u=SELFSTUDY&p=/DocumentResources/ChangeRequest/>

### Requested Change

Wichita State University seeks approval of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) to offer, through distance delivery, selected degrees in existing professional programs.

The university currently has two programs, the Registered Nurse to Bachelor of Science in Nursing (RN to BSN or RN-BSN) completion program and the Master of Arts in Gerontology, which are offered primarily asynchronously. Two other programs, the Master of Arts in Criminal Justice and Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction, plan to extend distance offerings. In addition, a proposed Master of Arts in Teaching program, also in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, will emphasize asynchronous instructional delivery.

Wichita State University plans to move very cautiously in the development of full online degrees. As an urban serving, research university dedicated to student learning, the institution's highest priority is maintenance of effective student learning experiences. To date, the initiative for distance education at WSU has come from individual faculty and selected departments with the assistance of the university's Media Resources Center (MRC). This request for institutional change is seen as an interim step to allow those few programs that are ready for 100 percent asynchronous degrees to proceed, while WSU thoughtfully develops a centralized strategy for distance education that is mission-appropriate, technologically feasible, and responsive to changing demands and expectations of both students and employers.

### Expected Outcomes

The primary purpose for offering online degrees is to increase access to higher education for students who cannot or choose not to pursue degrees on campus. The departments that offer these degrees also expect to increase or stabilize enrollment. Finally, expansion of online degrees is taking place to respond to student demand and expectations and to position WSU to remain competitive in the rapidly changing technological and economic environment of higher education. Wichita State University's focus will not shift to the creation of a large number of full asynchronous degrees. Rather, the emphasis will continue to be on development of distance technology to enhance existing degree programs.

### Impact on Mission, Numbers Served, and Breadth

Wichita State University is an urban serving, research university. The vast majority of students are from south central Kansas, and academic programs address the cultural, economic, and social interests of the region. As an institution, Wichita State University has no plans to move from primary emphasis on face-to-face instructional delivery. Nevertheless, many citizens face employment, family, and other responsibilities that make it difficult to

**CR.1** Media Resources  
Center  
[http://webs.wichita.edu/  
?u=mrcweb&p=/index](http://webs.wichita.edu/?u=mrcweb&p=/index)

take advantage of on-campus programs. In addition, younger students have expectations for the availability of sophisticated technology. Expansion into full online degrees in specified disciplines is expected to meet the needs of these students and to improve their access to higher education.

Online degree offerings will not change the breadth of academic offerings at WSU. All degree programs that are being proposed for full asynchronous delivery already exist except for the proposed Master of Arts in Teaching and that program is closely aligned with WSU's alternative teacher certification program. In general, the programs that offer significant online coursework offer similar programs on campus. It is expected that the number of students will increase.

### **HLC Policy Reference**

Wichita State University's change of status request is in compliance with Higher Learning Commission Policy I.C.2.b—Change in Educational Offerings. WSU seeks approval to extend accreditation to degree programs offered through distance delivery methods.

### **Factors Leading to Proposed Change**

Specific reasons for developing distance offerings vary somewhat by program. Wichita State University has been involved in distance education since the mid-1980s, beginning with videoconferencing and telecourses. These efforts were lead by the university's Media Resources Center.<sup>CR.1</sup> Video courses, most of them at the lower-division level, produced by national curriculum teams, provide the basic content for the class and can be viewed on WSU-13, WSU's cable television channel, or rented as a package. Faculty members supplement each course with five to eight face-to-face classes, to increase interactivity and to administer laboratories and assessments. Most telecourses are further supplemented with a Blackboard™ site. The telecourse has been popular with students, due to the convenience of viewing and reviewing course materials outside of normal university hours. In AY 2005, 25 faculty members taught 54 sections of telecourses to 1,910 students. One full-time MRC staff member works with faculty to review new courses, to coordinate licensure, and to offer a help line.

In the early 1990s, the MRC began an effort to provide live, interactive classes at a distance. The objective was to share one instructor with students on campus and at a distance and to save travel time for students. An electronic classroom was installed in the MRC, allowing three-camera coverage of the campus class to be broadcast simultaneously to multiple sites in a 30-mile radius. Over the next several years, a number of classes were offered from the College of Health Professions, W. Frank Barton School of Business, College of Education, College of Engineering, and Fairmount College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. A major shortcoming of this system was the fact that the video signal was one-way. The instructor could not see the students at the remote sites. The remote students could ask questions, through a phone bridge, but interaction was minimal.

A more effective distance program utilized ground lines between WSU and other Kansas Board of Regents (KBOR) universities to deliver a nurse practitioner degree. The ground lines, with a bridge administrated in Topeka, allowed two-way audio and video, albeit compressed (i.e., jerky) video. The downside of this solution was the expense of transmission. A more recent evolution has been the conversion to Internet-delivered signals. With the equipping of an electronic classroom at the new West Campus and the addition of ITV rooms in the College of Health Professions and the W. Frank Barton School of Business, it is hoped that more interactive courses will occur at WSU.

**CR.2** Media Courses, Fall 2002- Fall 2006  
(Resource Room CR-1)

**CR.3** School of Nursing  
[http://webs.wichita.edu/?u=chp\\_nurs&p=/index/](http://webs.wichita.edu/?u=chp_nurs&p=/index/)

Video-based distance education has largely been synchronous in its delivery. The emergence of the Internet and other digital technologies has allowed the university to begin offering content in an asynchronous mode. MRC staff members have worked with faculty to create totally online courses and have served as support team members in the creation of course modules. WSU has adopted Blackboard™ as its course management system. Most courses now have a Blackboard™ component. With the offering of dozens of MRC-sponsored workshops, faculty are introducing an increasing array of asynchronous features.

A complete list of distance courses offered at WSU over the past five years is included in the resource room.<sup>CR.2</sup> During that period, all six of the university's degree-granting colleges have had some distance offerings. The number of departments offering distance courses during fall and spring semester has remained very stable. In fall 2002, 23 departments offered distance courses, while in fall 2006, 22 departments offered such courses. The total number of sections and enrollments has varied somewhat but with no clear upward trend, except in the number of full online courses.

### **Relationship with On-Going Planning**

WSU's academic planning takes place in a decentralized environment. Individual colleges address planning issues within the context of overall university values and priorities as expressed in the Accountability Planning Matrix. Among the priorities are recruitment and retention of students in order to enhance their learning.

The self-study process for WSU's 2007 HLC comprehensive visit clearly revealed campus interest in discussing appropriate expansion of online instructional delivery. The current request to offer five degree programs is seen as the first step in a longer-term planning process to assess WSU's role in distance education. The history of those programs is highlighted below:

- RN-BSN. In the early 1990s the School of Nursing<sup>CR.3</sup> began using videoconferencing for the Kansas Primary Care Nurse Practitioner Program, a statewide collaborative with three other universities. Within the last five years, Internet course delivery has been substituted for some of these statewide courses, while videoconferencing for others continues. Students attend the videoconference sessions on their individual campuses. The

**CR.4** RN to BSN  
[http://webs.wichita.edu/?u=chp\\_nurs&p=rntobsnhomepage/](http://webs.wichita.edu/?u=chp_nurs&p=rntobsnhomepage/)

**CR.5** Gerontology Program  
<http://sca.wichita.edu/geron/>

**CR.6** Criminal Justice  
<http://criminaljustice.wichita.edu/>

**CR.7** Curriculum and Instruction  
<http://webs.wichita.edu/?u=ci&p=index>

school also participated in a federally funded Internet program for neonatal nurses with the University of Missouri at Kansas City from 1999 to 2003. Foundational coursework was delivered on each campus in the traditional method for this program, with clinical specialty coursework online. The first online course in the School of Nursing's Bachelor of Science Nursing Program (RN-BSN option)<sup>CR.4</sup> for students who are already registered nurses was in 1999.

The school's 2002–04 strategic initiatives identified completion of an online RN-BSN option as a school goal. Ongoing assessment of the online courses was identified as an essential component of the planning. More recent strategic initiatives call for adding an online student exit survey, developing a marketing plan, and increasing the number of community colleges with which the School of Nursing collaborates in the RN-BSN program.

- Gerontology. The gerontology program<sup>CR.5</sup> was among the first at WSU to use a telecourse format and materials (starting in 1990) for the Introduction to Gerontology class. In-person experiences for the students occurred four times during the semester. The program expanded into online delivery as technology became available. By fall semester 2002, several courses were offered totally asynchronously, and by 2005 all but two courses were offered online.
- Criminal Justice. The criminal justice program<sup>CR.6</sup> is housed in WSU's School of Community Affairs, as is the gerontology program. Faculty in criminal justice began development of an online Master of Arts in Criminal Justice degree in 2005 as part of its statewide mission to prepare professionals for careers in the criminal justice system. The program is still in development, with only three graduate courses having been offered. Full implementation will take place as faculty receive appropriate training. The target date for complete implementation is fall 2008.
- Curriculum and Instruction. In the early 2000s, the state of Kansas received a grant to develop a fully online program for alternative teacher certification. Four faculty in WSU's Department of Curriculum and Instruction<sup>CR.7</sup> designed whole courses for this program. As they worked with the alternative certification students from across the state, they recognized the possibility of having these students work their way through the state alternative certification program and directly into an online delivery of 24 hours of the master's program. In addition, graduates of WSU are teaching throughout the state and would be a good market for a WSU master's degree.

The department began development of an online master's degree in curriculum and instruction in fall 2005. An implementation plan was discussed in several graduate faculty meetings, as well as with the whole faculty. During spring 2006, the plan was approved to pilot a small group beginning in fall 2006, with the first course of the program offered via

the Internet. Each successive semester for four semesters will require an additional six credit hours of courses to be offered online so that the entire M.Ed. program will be fully piloted by spring 2008. This will complete only the core courses of the program, 24 of the 36 hours. Depending on the specific area of study chosen by the student, the additional 12 to 15 hours required in a specialty area can be taken on the WSU campus or online, or transferred from another institution. However, at this time, only one specialty area, the reading specialist, is offered via that mode of delivery.

## Needs Analysis

- Nursing. In the late 1990s the bachelor nursing curriculum, including the RN-BSN option, was revised. Because most of the students in the option were employed as RNs, there were requests for easier access to the program, and faculty members believed that online courses would encourage associate degree nurses to enter the program. The RN-BSN option coordinator developed and taught the first course, the RN Bridge course, and added additional online courses during the next two years. By fall 2004, all nursing courses and the clinical pharmacology course were offered online.
- Gerontology. In the summer of 2001, the coordinator of the gerontology program received a special projects grant to study and plan for conversion of some gerontology classes to asynchronous online/Internet formats in an attempt to reverse enrollment declines. Demographic data (the older adult population is currently 13 percent of the U.S. population and projected to increase to 20 percent by 2030) argued that gerontology was a valuable subject matter with potential for future growth. Therefore, it was decided to explore methods to increase enrollment and strengthen the program.

The reason for looking at an online/Internet format was because of general feedback, both at the university level and the broader higher education level, that students were seeking new alternatives to traditional classroom experiences. Many WSU students are non-traditional in the sense of being in their late 20s or early 30s when they begin or return to complete their college education. In addition, many students at WSU work full time or part time in jobs that make it difficult to attend daytime, on-campus classes. This has been especially true for the gerontology program, where about half of all students have current jobs in the aging service network but are seeking advancement through attainment of a master's degree in gerontology. Gerontology faculty used the special projects grant funds to develop materials for the asynchronous online/Internet presentation of five classes. Implementation of the online/Internet format began in the fall of 2002.

When online/Internet formats were first offered in the fall of 2002, the project was viewed as experimental, subject to analysis of enrollment impacts and student feedback. In the first semester, it was clear that students did, in fact, desire the alternative format of online/Internet education. For example, the Psychology of Aging class went from 17 students in fall 2001

(when last taught on campus) to 50 students in fall 2002 (first taught online/Internet). The Sociology of Aging course went from 18 students in fall 2001 to 35 students in fall 2002. The gerontology program began to receive more inquiries from potential applicants to the master's degree program as individuals learned about the online nature of some courses. Since 2002, the number of applicants in the master's degree program has increased, and as a result, online enrollments have also increased.

- Criminal Justice. Many students in the graduate criminal justice program are active law enforcement officers or active military personnel. Their work schedules change often, and in the case of the military students, they may be deployed during their enrollment, interrupting their degree program. Student interest in flexible scheduling was strong. Because the criminal justice program is housed in the School of Community Affairs, it was able to benefit from the experience of the gerontology faculty by developing online offerings.
- Curriculum and Instruction. Many students in the Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction program are full-time classroom teachers in several surrounding districts, as well as districts throughout the state. Their work schedules and commuting distance make it very difficult for some of them to pursue this degree program. These factors weighed heavily into the decision to pilot the first online courses and the courses for the core of the M.Ed. To begin the online portion of the M.Ed. program, students interested in that option enroll in one of the current sections of the program. Online students use the same program goals and same required program assessments, and attain the same outcomes. Instruction that occurs one week in class is delivered at a distance through a variety of means, including podcasts of instructional units from the on-site group, Web-based lessons, independent readings, and live online chats. Two faculty members work to facilitate the on-site group and create the modules for the online delivery for the online students. One is a full-time, senior faculty member. The second is a master's level educator who is currently a full-time school technology specialist in a local district. Both faculty members serve as facilitators for both the synchronous and the asynchronous parts of the course. These faculty members receive load credit as if it were one section of courses only.

The proposed Master of Arts in Teaching will complement the M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction, the former as a first licensure degree and the latter as a graduate option for those already licensed via undergraduate degree work.

### **Involvement of Various Constituencies**

All of the proposed programs solicited input from current students, recent alumni, and practicing professionals in their respective disciplines. The staff of the university Media Resources Center has worked with faculty in all of the departments on course design, pedagogy, and assessment of student learning.

## Necessary Approvals

Wichita State University has well-established curriculum approval processes.<sup>CR.8</sup> They begin at the department level and proceed through college and university level committees. Internally, the department faculty initiate all curriculum change processes. The forms require a description and justification for proposed changes. At the present time, the process for approving distance courses and programs is identical to traditional courses and programs.

Externally, the Kansas Board of Regents encourages the development of online programs and has established policies that incorporate the Higher Learning Commission best practices in distance education.<sup>CR.9</sup> The KBOR approves all new program proposals,<sup>CR.10</sup> which must include a detailed justification for the program in terms of student demand, institutional mission, and anticipated student learning outcomes. The KBOR endorses the legitimacy of distance education as a viable delivery mode for higher education and supports decentralized institutional control in the use of distance learning technologies.

## Impact on Identified Challenges from the 1997 Comprehensive Visit

As the accompanying self-study reports, there were four concerns expressed in the 1997 site visit.<sup>CR.11</sup> These were clarity of mission, effective planning, actions resulting from assessment activities, and measurable outcomes for general education. Responses to these concerns can be found in the introduction of the self-study.

The proposed change of status is directly related to the university's mission as an urban serving, research university committed to student learning. The programs are all designed to expand access to professional programs that meet the workforce needs of south central Kansas, as well as the entire state. Program goals align with institutional goals found in the Accountability Planning Matrix. Development of all programs has been integrated into department-level strategic planning and responds to student demands and faculty research interests. Furthermore, all programs are integrated into department assessment plans that include student learning outcomes and assessment of those outcomes.<sup>CR.12</sup>

## Plans to Implement and Sustain Proposed Change

### Faculty Involvement

Faculty are responsible for curriculum at Wichita State University. University policy requires faculty approval of all curriculum changes. No academic program can be developed without faculty support. The five degree programs included in this change request have all been initiated by faculty.

- Nursing. The School of Nursing staffs online courses in the same manner in which it staffs other courses, with the exception that those teaching online courses must have been trained in Blackboard™ and/or online course instruction. Any curricular content that has been adapted from regular to

**CR.8** Curriculum Approval Forms  
(Resource Room CR-2)

**CR.9** KBOR Distance Education Plan  
<http://www.kansasregents.org/download/meetings/2006/February%202006/February%2015%20&%2016%202006%20minus%20Resolutions.pdf>

**CR.10** KBOR Program Approval Policies (Appendix G)  
<http://www.kansasregents.org/academic/policymanual.html>

**CR.11** 1997 NCA Site Team Report  
[http://webs.wichita.edu/depttools/depttoolsmemberfiles/SelfStudy/NCA\\_Report\\_of\\_a\\_visit\\_to\\_WSU.pdf](http://webs.wichita.edu/depttools/depttoolsmemberfiles/SelfStudy/NCA_Report_of_a_visit_to_WSU.pdf)

**CR.12** Assessment Plans  
[http://webs.wichita.edu/success/Assessment/Assessment\\_Plans.htm](http://webs.wichita.edu/success/Assessment/Assessment_Plans.htm)

**CR.13** Minutes of RN-BSN  
Faculty Committee  
(Resource Room CR-3)

**CR.14** NCATE Standards  
[http://www.ncate.org/public/  
standards.asp?ch=4](http://www.ncate.org/public/standards.asp?ch=4)

online has been converted with consultation from faculty and technical specialists.

Faculty interested in online education participate in training for online instruction and work with the Media Resources Center staff on course development. Additional faculty members receive training and are mentored as needed by the program coordinator and other faculty now skilled in such teaching. There has been very limited release time for faculty development of online courses and no release time for online teaching. To date, only one adjunct faculty member has taught online courses in the School of Nursing. She has a long-time affiliation with the school and has received appropriate training.

The School of Nursing has a faculty committee that oversees the RN-BSN option. The committee meets monthly and reviews enrollment, curriculum, technology, and teaching issues, as well as monitors student progress.<sup>CR.13</sup>

- Gerontology. The School of Community Affairs includes three academic programs—gerontology, criminal justice, and ethnic studies. Gerontology was the first to use online instruction. Being a small program, all program faculty were involved in the conversion of selected classes to online/Internet formats. Training and orientation for online teaching were conducted by the MRC. No adjuncts or lecturers were used to teach online courses until FY 2006, following the retirement of the senior faculty member in the program.
- Criminal Justice. Criminal justice faculty have relied heavily on the expertise of the gerontology faculty to pursue distance education. The program follows the same structure as gerontology, depending on full-time faculty for the vast majority of graduate courses. Faculty who wish to offer online courses must be trained before proceeding. The full faculty meet regularly and are involved in development of the online master's degree.
- Curriculum and Instruction. The Department of Curriculum and Instruction differs from other departments with extensive online curriculum in that both traditional and online programs make extensive use of adjunct faculty. This is a deliberate policy decision based on principles of professional education and aligned with NCATE accreditation standards.<sup>CR.14</sup> Staffing for online delivery is currently following the same procedures as for traditional programs.

Faculty who teach courses using online delivery are provided as much training as is needed for the individual. Faculty members arrange for individual instruction from the educational technical support team of the College of Education. This same process is followed for all part-time and adjunct faculty who teach online courses. The college educational technology support staff routinely provide in-service on new trends and products for faculty and frequently offer opportunities for faculty to learn how to apply new products, software, and Internet sites to their particular courses.

The Master's in Curriculum and Instruction Program Committee planned and refined the online M.Ed. over a period of a full semester.<sup>CR.15</sup> Faculty on that committee were involved in the development of the proposal that was put before the entire department faculty in spring 2006. The committee continues to monitor program implementation.

**CR.15** Minutes of Curriculum and Instruction Program Committee (Resource Room CR-4)

### **Administrative Structure**

Presently, Wichita State University maintains no separate administrative structures for distance education. All offerings are fully integrated with department degree operations and managed at the department and college levels with central administrative oversight. For example, no courses can be included in the schedule of courses and offered for credit without going through the Office of the Registrar, which maintains strict enforcement of university curriculum adoption processes.

The WSU Media Resources Center coordinates the Blackboard™ course management system, which is loaded on secure servers located in the University Computing and Telecommunications Services center. In summer 2006, WSU began converting all student information to a new software system, Banner Enterprise Resource Planning. These security precautions take place regardless of the class format (online/Internet or on-campus). Faculty are kept abreast of copyright compliance and instructional policies through training and via e-mail announcements sent by the educational technology support staff.

Future discussions will address the advisability of WSU adopting more centralized control of distance education, but it is not expected that offerings will be separated from the day-to-day control of departmental faculty. In other words, online programs will not be administered through the Division of Continuing Education.

### **Resource Availability**

The Higher Learning Commission *Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs* identifies a number of important resources for effective online degrees. These include faculty support, student support, and technical support, and financial support, as well as evaluation and assessment, all of which are aligned with the institutional mission. Because Wichita State University expects that most of its distance offerings will be hybrids of online technology and face-to-face instruction, a full array of support services earmarked for online services has not been developed. However, programs included in this change request have clearly identified the resources and support services that are essential to effective online student learning. As more and more departments offer online coursework, even if not full degrees, the appropriate resources must be made available. These include student support, library resources, academic and career counseling, and technical support.

Wichita State University continues the process of implementing Banner Enterprise Resource Planning. Therefore, the entire university has shifted to

**CR.16** Impact of Online Discussions on Student Outcomes in Gerontology (Resource Room CR-5)

Web-based student services including application, catalogs, schedule of courses, enrollment, financial aid, and tuition/fee payment. Thus, registration and payment do not vary between online and on-campus students. Individuals who encounter problems with these processes have access to phone lines and online help.

University Libraries offer a considerable array of electronic services for students enrolled in online courses, including clear help sheets developed for using each part of the library. The entire catalog of holdings is available online. In addition, students have access to more than 100 electronic data bases, many with full-text references. The university collection includes 13,000 electronic journals and more than 15,000 electronic books. A recent service addition for online students is a photocopying service. Students enrolled in distance courses who live more than 25 miles from campus can request up to 15 articles, which University Libraries will copy and mail at no cost to the student.

Advising for online students is handled at the department level via telephone, e-mail, and face-to-face contact, depending on student preference and proximity to campus.

Nursing student advisement and counseling is conducted by the program coordinator and one other faculty member familiar with the RN-BSN option. Students are assisted by the school's academic counselor and the undergraduate program director. The program coordinator also assists students who need technical assistance in addition to that provided by the university Help Line (978-HELP), which is staffed by the Media Resources Center. There is an optional face-to-face orientation prior to taking the first online course and for those who need additional assistance.

Gerontology and criminal justice classes at WSU make regular use of the Discussion Forum feature within the Blackboard™ system. Classes require a minimum level of weekly postings into the Discussion Forum by students. Interaction among gerontology students and between students and faculty is being empirically evaluated using the measure of interaction as "mouse clicks" within the Blackboard™ Discussion Forum. In related research presented at the Gerontological Society of America in fall 2005, it was noted that students who actively participate in online discussions are more likely to receive A or B level grades.<sup>CR.16</sup> As well, the qualitative content of their discussions is significantly higher (more evaluative, analytical, and application-oriented) compared to those who only participate at a minimal level of interaction.

As noted previously, the School of Community Affairs has a Blackboard™ technology specialist who is geographically located near the gerontology and criminal justice offices, making it convenient and timely for in-person contacts when problems arise. The specialist also monitors e-mail messages and is prompt in responding to requests for assistance from both faculty and students. Students also have access to the university Help Line.

In the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, each online class has a link to College of Education and university Web pages that provide information regarding the support services available to students. In addition, faculty teaching the courses provide information to students when requested. Student interaction is monitored through the tracking abilities of Blackboard™. Evaluation of faculty is built into the system for the online M.Ed., the same as it is for the more traditional students.<sup>CR.17</sup> In addition, students are provided e-mail addresses and telephone numbers for university faculty to ensure they receive adequate support and interaction with instructors and other students.

**CR.17** Examples of Online Faculty Evaluations for Curriculum and Instruction (Resource Room CR-6)

**CR.18** List of CTRE Workshops (Resource Room CR-7)

Faculty are continually kept abreast of advancements in the field of online technology by attending professional conferences on the topic and by attending professional development opportunities provided by the College of Education technology support team.

Technical assistance is available to faculty on an as-needed basis from the College of Education technology support team. Students needing assistance can contact the course instructor via telephone or e-mail. An announcement is posted on the Blackboard™ site informing students where to go for needed technical assistance in the use of Blackboard™. The WSU Help Line is available for other forms of assistance, including specific help with Web mail.

Resources of the Media Resources Center are used to stay current with new technologies and to offer workshops and one-on-one training. The center's goal is to empower faculty to efficiently and effectively use new tools for teaching and learning. MRC staff are currently proficient with videoconferencing, DVD authoring, and streaming. Staff are prepared to help faculty with audio and video iPod creation and distribution. Depending upon the level of funding (including research monies), the MRC staff is prepared to continue the current enhancement of campus-based courses (the hybrid model) and to assist with degree-based online courses.

The Center for Teaching and Research Excellence (CTRE) also provides an important faculty resource by providing workshops and other resources to assist faculty in the development of online courses.<sup>CR.18</sup>

### **Financial Resources**

Because WSU is in the early phases of online instructional delivery, all resources and operations are fully integrated with college and departmental activities. Central support is provided through the CTRE and the MRC, which has a FY 2007 budget of \$1.3 million and 21 full-time equivalent employees.

In the past, the College of Health Professions has employed graduate teaching associates to assist with technology and Blackboard™ support. Currently, the college is in the process of hiring a full-time educational technologist for FY 2007. This individual will provide leadership for the management and planning of instructional technology, including online instruction, within the college.

The online nursing courses are budgeted as part of the school's operating budget. No external funding was obtained for these courses, and no additional funding has flowed to the school for offering online courses. The school and college monitor student enrollments and credit-hour production. Course loads in the School of Nursing do not exceed three courses per semester, and the school has limited enrollment in online courses to 20 students per section. Traditional on-campus didactic undergraduate nursing courses may have as many as 60 students enrolled.

The gerontology and criminal justice programs at WSU do not have budgets separate from the overall budget for the School of Community Affairs, which is housed within the Fairmount College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Conversion of classes to an online/Internet format did not involve the addition or deletion of faculty members; thus, there was no personnel impact on the budget. As opposed to monitoring revenues per se, the school monitors enrollments, which have grown significantly in gerontology and show considerable promise in criminal justice. Key expenditure items since the implementation of online courses in the fall of 2002 have been new computers for gerontology faculty and supporting software (e.g., Respondus).

The gerontology and criminal justice programs also have the assistance of the School of Community Affairs technology specialist who has received advanced training in Blackboard™. He serves as the trainer for staff and students in online/Internet classes. Online courses are set up such that this individual has full "instructor" access to all online/Internet courses. This access means that he is automatically notified when students develop online access problems and when students send e-mail messages via the Blackboard™ program. This allows him to assist the students and individual instructors in the timeliest fashion possible. This individual is well-versed in the diagnosis of issues and problems as they arise, for both students and faculty. He also oversees the maintenance of all computer hardware and software for the School of Community Affairs and ensures that all maintenance is up-to-date.

The College of Education has a staff of four full-time and two to three part-time highly qualified technical support staff who provide ample support for faculty and programs utilizing educational technology such as Blackboard™, podcasts, and other forms of social software. They are available on an as-needed basis to provide maintenance and upgrades of software and hardware. In addition, faculty have access to college and university servers with remote access for backup. Files used for the online courses can be saved on the college or university servers but are also backed up in Blackboard™.

The technology staff has recently provided professional development for faculty in the area of podcasting, and the use of blogs and wikis. In addition, free software has been identified, which can help students maintain resources, keep bookmarks, develop Web sites, write joint reports, etc. Technology tools are identified, explored by the technology staff, and presented to faculty as needed. Because online courses are part of a faculty member's regular load in the

College of Education, no additional budget has been required. If and when the online program grows, it can simply replace one section of synchronous course offerings in the program. At this time, there is no intention to eliminate the synchronized sections of the program. Sections of online courses will be offered at one faculty member per 15 students.

### **Timeline**

Any expansion of online degrees and even expansion of hybrid course offerings at Wichita State University will require a careful review of resource requirements, particularly for technical support for both faculty and students. Over the next two years, WSU will develop an institutional plan for distance education. The plan will build on the work of an ad hoc committee that prepared this request for change of status with the HLC. The distance education task force will include faculty from departments experienced in distance education, staff from the Media Resources Center and the Center for Teaching and Research Excellence, as well as other faculty, staff, and administrators. Committee deliberations will focus on the HLC *Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degrees and Certificate Programs*. In the meantime, each of the five programs enumerated will continue to implement existing plans and timetables.

- Nursing. The School of Nursing plans to continue to offer nursing courses in the RN-BSN option online. Student response has been positive, and with other Kansas schools offering online options for RNs, the program must be online to be competitive. It is anticipated that additional School of Nursing courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels will be totally online in the future and that there will be many more courses that have Blackboard™ components. Current initiatives include development of an online student survey, a marketing plan, and expanded partnerships with community colleges. These will be accomplished within the next two years. The school is also developing a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree, and it is projected that the transition portion of that program for those who hold master's degrees in nursing will be an online option. The DNP degree is expected to receive KBOR approval in 2007 and be implemented sometime after the 2007–08 academic year.
- Gerontology. At the present time, short- and long-term plans for the gerontology program are to continue offering the majority of classes in an online/Internet format. The goal is to have all core/required classes and some electives available in the online/Internet format by FY 2008, while continuing to offer some electives in traditional, on-campus formats. This online/Internet format blend with elective on-campus classes is felt to be appropriate because it will ensure that the gerontology program meets all federal requirements for international students, provides “traditional” students who desire classroom interactions with that opportunity, and also provides the flexibility to those students who need the asynchronous online/Internet format. A new faculty member is currently being recruited, and online experience is a preferred qualification for all applicants.

**CR.19** Examples of Assessment Feedback (Resource Room CR-8)

**CR.20** Examples of Enrollment and Graduation Reports in Nursing (Resource Room CR-9)

- Criminal Justice. The online Master of Arts in Criminal Justice degree is in the planning stages at this time. Additional courses will go online as faculty are trained in appropriate course design and teaching methods. The target date for full implementation is fall 2008.
- Curriculum and Instruction. In the spring of 2007, the second six-hour course in the M.Ed. program will be offered online. The following year, two courses will be offered each semester, one a traditional four-hour course and the second a two-hour portfolio or thesis course. After four consecutive semesters, the first 24 hours of the degree program will be completed and ready for a second cohort of students beginning fall 2008. This will allow for one cohort of students to progress through the core courses at a pace that will enable adjustments to be made during the course of the semesters. Because cohorts are required to begin in fall semester, the department will spend this year examining the potential of offering a full cohort of online students beginning fall 2007.

### **Strategies to Evaluate the Proposed Change**

All proposed online degrees at WSU are fully integrated with existing assessments and evaluations. These include monitoring of enrollment, collection of student course evaluations, and assessment of student learning.

One way to ensure good instructional design is to be current with the literature and empirical research that assesses online/Internet education. WSU faculty have compiled an annotated bibliography of over 100 articles that examine the development of and assessment of the outcomes of online/Internet education across disciplines. Online education can be evaluated at the program, course, and individual student levels. At the present time, evaluation of the asynchronous courses is taking place at the individual student and course levels. Full program evaluation will take place upon approval of the change of status to allow 100 percent asynchronous degrees.

All graduate and undergraduate academic programs at WSU have assessment plans that include student learning outcomes. Since the online degrees are all part of existing academic programs, they are included in departmental assessment activities. Information from the assessment of asynchronous courses has been used to improve online/Internet course materials and presentation formats in both nursing and gerontology.<sup>CR.19</sup> Online/Internet courses carry the same expectation of faculty competence in content and instructional methods, and online course evaluations are part of annual faculty evaluations.

#### **Nursing**

The School of Nursing's evaluation plan, developed to assure compliance with its accrediting body, requires the program to track student retention rates, regardless of the format in which a course is delivered. The undergraduate program director and the RN-BSN coordinator monitor the enrollment and graduation reports.<sup>CR.20</sup> A number of RN-BSN students drop out of the program

for a time due to work or family obligations. While enrollments in the RN-BSN option have not increased, remaining at a headcount of approximately 25 per year, enrollments of such students have fallen nationally during this time. The program provides an avenue for career advancement and is a feeder for the school's master's program in nursing.

Consistent with the school's evaluation plan, all courses are reviewed periodically by the appropriate curriculum committee of the faculty. End-of-program student surveys are monitored by an RN-BSN committee, and the undergraduate program director and chair of the school.<sup>CR.21</sup> A similar process is used for the graduate online courses. Nursing uses an online student assessment of all instructors.

As mentioned earlier, faculty training in the development of online coursework and appropriate support services from the WSU Media Resource Center are critical in ensuring good instructional design. Faculty who teach in these courses must have experience and training, and the school will not assign faculty to teach in these courses unless they have such experience. Faculty members teaching online coursework require students to use the Assessment Statistics Course Evaluation for all Blackboard™ classes.<sup>CR.22</sup> These evaluations are utilized by faculty to make course revisions and are submitted as part of the faculty member's annual review process.

### Gerontology

In gerontology, assessment of student learning involves outcome assessments of student mastery of specific course content specified in the program assessment plan. For example, student learning in the Biology of Aging course involves analysis of student responses on an exam that addresses theories of aging; student learning in the target area of the Multidisciplinary Perspectives course involves identification and analysis of empirical research articles obtained by the students. Results of this analysis are contained in the most recent Graduate Assessment Plan. Course-level evaluations are also underway. The gerontology program coordinator has compared student assessments using the Instructional Development and Effectiveness Assessment (IDEA) evaluation for courses taught pre-online conversion (2001) and post-online conversion (2003). Results were recently presented at the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education meeting and are available in the resource room.<sup>CR.23</sup>

Online offerings have proven very successful for gerontology. Between academic year 2001–02, the year prior to introduction of distance offerings, and academic year 2005–06, student credit hours increased 171 percent. All faculty are evaluated using the IDEA survey. Students in the class complete IDEA evaluations at the end of the semester to rate the course (and online courses have compared favorably with on-campus delivery). The evaluations are administered as a survey in order to preserve the anonymity of student assessment. The results are reviewed by the instructor and program administrators.

**CR.21** Examples of End of Program Student Surveys in Nursing  
(Resource Room CR-10)

**CR.22** Examples of Blackboard Assessment Statistics Course Evaluations  
(Resource Room CR-11)

**CR.23** Comparison of Pre and Post Online Student Evaluations in Gerontology  
(Resource Room CR-12)

The WSU Graduate School requires programs to track retention rates, regardless of the format in which a course is delivered. Each semester, the gerontology program coordinator reviews enrollment reports and compares them with those students formally accepted into the master's program. At this time, it is too early to make any statements about the retention of these online/Internet students compared to previous cohorts when all classes were on-campus formats. However, this information is and will be continuously monitored.

### **Criminal Justice**

For master's students in criminal justice, the assessment techniques used (examination/testing and qualitative evaluation of work for level of thought processing) are very similar to the techniques used when teaching on-campus classes. The only significant difference is the transmission format (e.g., directly handing back a paper with written comments to a student during class versus e-mailing the paper back to the student with instructor comments embedded in the attached file). The online master's degree is new, and faculty are working closely with the gerontology faculty to develop appropriate program and course assessments.

Blackboard™ software allows for confidentiality of student grades by keeping the gradebook items secure and accessible only by the student and faculty member. Papers may be submitted and returned through a secure dropbox. Beyond that, only the faculty member teaching the course has access to the course. In addition, Blackboard™ Safe Assignments allows the monitoring of the student work for plagiarism.

### **Curriculum and Instruction**

Since the M.Ed. in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction is a newly developed program, retention data are not currently available. However, student data including retention rates will be maintained on the College of Education data management system that is currently in place. All online students who started the program are still participating.

Methods used to assess student learning are much the same as methods used to assess student learning in synchronous settings. Students in both settings are required to complete action research projects, literature reviews, annotated bibliographies, poster presentations, grant writing, presentations at conferences, portfolios, and various other assessments. The assessments allow for alternate forms of delivery with common rubrics for all. Course discussions are also an important means of assessing student learning in both settings. However, in the asynchronous setting, an electronic record of all of these methods for assessing student learning is available.

The content and major assessments for the online section of this program will be the same as the on-site sections. Only the delivery mode will change. However, the modules developed to deliver the content online will be presented to the M.Ed. committee as they are being developed to ensure high-quality instruction.

In addition, the faculty member piloting this section of the program teaches graduate classes on the use of technology in instructional design. She was also a consultant on a team who piloted online programs for the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), delivered to teachers in Bermuda. She is a presenter and author for ISTE, focusing on the use of technology in schools and universities. Therefore, her expertise on educational technology standards is being applied to the development of these courses. The site facilitator who works with the faculty member is a school-based technology and professional development staff support person in a local school district.

Upon internal and KBOR approval of the proposed Master of Arts in Teaching, the Department of Curriculum and Instruction will apply similar assessment practices.

## **Summary**

Wichita State University requests a change in its status with the Higher Learning Commission to offer five degrees through distance delivery. Those programs are the RN-BSN option in nursing, the master's degrees in gerontology and criminal justice, the M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction, and a proposed Master of Arts in Teaching. WSU does not seek additional authority to offer more degrees because extensive distance degrees are not part of its strategic plan at the present time. Over the next two years, the university will study trends in distance education, assess the interest of students and employers in developing more extensive online offerings, determine the interest of faculty to participate in such programs, identify the technical and financial resources necessary to ensure effective student learning experiences, and specify those disciplines for which distance degrees make sense within the context of WSU's mission as an urban serving, research university, its student body, and the needs of local employers.

## **Ad Hoc Committee on Distance Education**

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**Nancy McCarthy Snyder, Chair**

Academic Affairs and Research  
Associate Vice President/Director of Reaccreditation

**Mara Alagic**

Curriculum and Instruction  
Associate Professor

**Mary Corrigan**

School of Community Affairs, Gerontology  
Assistant Professor

**Sharon Iorio**

Fairmount College of Liberal Arts and Sciences  
Associate Dean/Professor

**Peggy Jewel**

Curriculum and Instruction  
Assistant Professor/Chair, University Curriculum Committee

**Charles Koeber**

Sociology/Center for Teaching and Research Effectiveness  
Associate Professor/Director

**Pina Mozzani**

School of Music  
Associate Professor

**Juanita Tate**

School of Nursing/College of Health Professions  
Chair/Associate Dean

**Mike Wood**

Media Resources Center  
Executive Director