

**Request for Formal Approval  
Of Distance Education Activity**

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## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>I. What Change is Being Proposed?</b> .....	<b>1</b>
A. The Proposed Specific Change .....	<b>1</b>
B. Expected Outcomes.....	<b>3</b>
C. Impact on UIS’ Mission, Numbers and Types of Students, and Breadth of Educational Offerings .....	<b>4</b>
D. Commission Policies/Procedures Relevant to This Change .....	<b>6</b>
<b>II. Factors that Led UIS to Undertake This Change</b> .....	<b>6</b>
A. Relationship Between Proposed Change and Ongoing Planning .....	<b>6</b>
B. Needs Analysis Related to This Change .....	<b>7</b>
C. Involvement of Various Constituencies in Developing This Proposed Change	<b>8</b>
<b>III. Approvals Obtained to Implement the Proposed Change</b> .....	<b>8</b>
A. Internal Approvals.....	<b>8</b>
B. External Approvals.....	<b>8</b>
<b>IV. Potential Impact on Challenges Identified by the Commission as Part of     or Subsequent to the Last Comprehensive Visit</b> .....	<b>9</b>
A. Challenges Identified .....	<b>9</b>
B. How UIS Has Addressed the Challenges .....	<b>9</b>
<b>V. Plans to Implement and Sustain the Proposed Change</b> .....	<b>9</b>
A. Involvement of Appropriately Credentialed Faculty and Experienced Staff.....	<b>9</b>
B. Administrative Structure .....	<b>11</b>
C. Learning Resources and Support Services .....	<b>12</b>
D. Financial Data That Document UIS’ Capacity to Implement and Sustain the Proposed Change .....	<b>14</b>
E. Timeline to Implement the Change .....	<b>14</b>
F. Strategies for Maintaining Academic Quality .....	<b>14</b>
<b>VI. Organization’s Strategies to Evaluate the Proposed Change</b> .....	<b>15</b>
A. Measures UIS will Use to Document Achievement of Expected Outcomes...	<b>15</b>
B. How Assessment of Student Learning is Integrated into the Assessment Program .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>17</b>

**List of Tables**

Table 1: UIS Online Degree Programs as of AY 2005-2006 ..... 2

Table 2: Headcount of Program Majors in Online Programs ..... 4

**Appendix**

Appendix A: Sloan Grant Proposal Development Guidelines ..... 18

**The University of Illinois at Springfield  
Request for Formal Approval of Distance Education Activity**

**Introduction**

The University of Illinois at Springfield (UIS) is requesting approval for its existing online programs and for future online programs that will be developed, implemented, and supported in a similar manner. UIS' interaction with the North Central Association/Higher Learning Commission regarding the use of technology for the delivery of a degree program dates back to a distance delivery nursing program at UIS, which utilized a combination of face-to-face and synchronous compressed video technology. The nursing program was reviewed and approved by the North Central Association in 1996. The more recent expansion of UIS' distance learning programs, using the newest online technology, establishes the need for this change request.

This report describes UIS' existing online programs and plans for additional programs in the future, focusing on the six major questions presented under the Higher Learning Commission's guidelines for *Documentation to Support a Change Request* (as noted in Higher Learning Commission, *The Handbook of Accreditation*, 2003). This report addresses (1) the change that is being proposed, (2) the factors that led to the change, (3) the approvals that were obtained to implement the change, (4) the impact the change may have on challenges identified by the Commission during or subsequent to the last comprehensive visit, (5) the plans to implement and sustain the change, and (6) strategies to evaluate the change.

**I. What Change is Being Proposed?**

**A. The Proposed Specific Change**

UIS is requesting approval of its existing online programs, as well as future online or blended (a combination of on-campus and online courses) certificates or programs that will be developed and supported in a similar manner. As of 2005-2006, UIS has eight online degree programs, including two graduate programs and six undergraduate programs (see Table 1).

UIS' model is to take existing on-campus degree programs and offer them online with the same curricular requirements. Each of the online degree programs, with the exception of the Philosophy B.A. and the Master of Arts in Teacher Leadership program, already existed as a traditional on-campus degree program at the time the online program was established. UIS utilized its on-campus philosophy minor as a foundation for the establishment of both an on-campus and online philosophy degree program in 2004. The Masters in Teacher Leadership program previously was offered as a concentration under the Master's of Education Leadership program, but now is a separate degree that is offered only online.

**Table 1: UIS Online Degree Programs as of AY 2005-2006**

1998	Master of Science in Management Information Systems
1999	Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies
2000	Master of Arts in Teacher Leadership
2002	Bachelor of Arts in English
2003	Bachelor of Science in Computer Science
2003	Bachelor of Arts in History
2004	Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy
2004	Bachelor of Arts in Mathematical Sciences with the option of secondary math certification

The online undergraduate programs at UIS are degree completion programs, not entire baccalaureate degrees. Students typically transfer into a UIS online program after having completed general education courses at another institution. They then may pursue their major in an online format.

UIS online degree programs are developed to offer students an alternative means of access to education. Having both an on-campus program and a comparable online program in particular degree areas allows students the opportunity to select the type of course delivery that best meets their needs.

UIS also offers two online graduate certificate programs in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, one in Systems Security and another in Information Assurance. The curricula focus on developing a cadre of teachers qualified to teach information assurance and systems security classes at community colleges and universities. These certificates are offered only in an online format and are open only to college faculty participating in faculty development courses offered through the Center for Systems Security and Information Assurance at Moraine Valley Community College. An online Career Specialist certificate, formerly offered by the College of Education and Human Services, has been suspended due to resource limitations.

During the next four years, UIS plans to add at least eight more online degree programs. These programs initially will be supported in part through a \$1.2 million grant from the Sloan Foundation. The grant will be used to fund stipends to faculty who develop new online course and to help pay for the initials cost associated with the hiring of new faculty and online program coordinators to assist with student recruitment, admissions, marketing, and other related duties.

The first round of proposal preparation and review for the most recent Sloan Program occurred in AY 2004-2005. The six programs that were selected and are currently being developed for online delivery include:

1. Master of Arts in Environmental Studies – natural resources and sustainable development concentration
2. Master of Science in Computer Science
3. Master of Arts in Human Services – social services concentration

4. Chief School Business Officer Post-Master's Certificate – a new concentration within the existing Post-Master's Certificate for School Superintendents
5. Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration
6. Bachelor's Degree in Economics

A second round of proposal development and review is taking place during AY 2005-2006. It is expected that at least two additional programs will be selected for online delivery.

In the future, additional online programs or blended degree programs or certificates may be established at UIS depending on student demand and other institutional considerations. These programs will be developed and implemented in a manner that is consistent with the UIS policies and procedures described in this report.

### B. Expected Outcomes

The main expected outcomes from the UIS online programs are (1) increased student access to degree completion, (2) increased student enrollments for programs that are offered online, (3) increased diversity among UIS students, and (4) increased knowledge about how technology and online programs can be used to enhance student learning.

To achieve the increased student access, enrollment and diversity outcomes, UIS has undertaken extensive marketing and outreach to attract students to its online programs. This has included advertising the online programs in newspapers and web media and participating in the Illinois Virtual Campus, an electronic catalog of online and distance learning courses available from approximately 70 Illinois colleges and universities. UIS coordinates its outreach efforts with the University Outreach and Program Services (UOPS) unit that is a part of the University of Illinois.

Individual programs and colleges also have conducted their own outreach. For example, the Director of Online Programs for the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, has developed a statewide network of about 30 community colleges. In Fall 2004, about 50% of the entering online students in the college came from that network of community colleges.

Beginning in Fall 2003, UIS initiated an e-tuition policy whereby students who are not Illinois residents who are enrolled in an online degree program qualify for a special tuition rate lower than the on-campus non-resident tuition and pay no fees for campus services. This policy appears to have had a significant positive impact on out-of-state enrollments. In Fall 2004 and Fall 2005, online enrollment from students outside of the State of Illinois accounted for about 35-40% compared to 5-7% prior to the implementation of the e-tuition policy.

The other expected outcome of increased knowledge about how technology and online programs can be used to enhance student learning primarily is being pursued by individual faculty who are teaching in online programs and by the Director and staff of

the university's Office of Technology-Enhanced Learning (OTEL). UIS faculty and staff regularly make presentations at professional conferences and publish reports on scholarship related to online education issues.

C. Impact on UIS' Mission, Numbers and Types of Students, and Breadth of Educational Offerings

The offering of online programs is consistent with the UIS mission of serving nontraditional students, including older students who may be balancing work, family, and educational needs. These students may find the online programs to be more flexible and adaptable to their time and geographical location constraints.

In Fall 2005, online majors accounted for 16% of the student headcount (15% of undergraduate students and 18% of graduate students). The total number of online majors was 737. A breakdown of the student headcount by program is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
**Headcount of Program Majors in Online Programs**

<u>Program</u>	<u># of Majors</u>
Master of Science in Management Information Systems	85
Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies	184
Master of Arts in Master Teaching and Leadership	252
Bachelor of Arts in English	42
Bachelor of Science in Computer Science	76
Bachelor of Arts in History	42
Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy	26
Bachelor of Arts in Mathematical Sciences	<u>30</u>
Total	737

Almost one-fourth (24%) of the credit hours at UIS in Fall 2005 were generated by online courses. Over one third of UIS students (37%) were taking at least one online course and about one-fifth of the students (22%) were registered only in online courses. A total of 1,670 students were taking online classes.

Data on the characteristics of UIS online students compared to UIS on-campus students indicate that there is little difference in race/ethnicity or gender between these two groups. This suggests that the online programs are accessible and inclusive in terms of race/ethnicity and gender.

However, there are differences between on-campus students and online students in terms of the average age and the geographical area in which the students come from. The data for Fall 2005 indicate that:

- online students, on average, are older than on-campus students
  - among graduate students, the average age for online students is 35 compared to 32 for on-campus students

- among undergraduate students, the average age for online students is 36 compared to 27 for on-campus students
- a larger percentage of online students reside outside Illinois and outside Sangamon County, the county in which UIS is located
  - 37% of online students report mailing addresses from outside Illinois compared to 3% of on-campus students
  - among Illinois students, 84% of the Illinois online majors report mailing addresses outside Sangamon County compared to 43% of the on-campus Illinois student majors

The online students in Fall 2005 came from 42 states, the District of Columbia, and Alberta.

These data suggest that the existence of online degree programs may offer older students and students who reside in areas that are not geographically close to the UIS campus the opportunity to pursue higher education. This type of outreach and inclusiveness is consistent with UIS' mission and role.

UIS also has entered into a collaborative undertaking with Chicago State University, an urban commuter campus in Chicago with a significant minority enrollment. The staff of the Office of Technology Enhanced Learning is conducting faculty development workshops at Chicago State University and UIS faculty members are mentoring Chicago State University faculty in online pedagogy using Blackboard and Elluminate (a synchronous web conferencing program). To encourage the inclusion of diversity in view points and discussions in the classroom, faculty at the two campuses have the opportunity to use Blackboard discussion groups and Elluminate sessions within their classes to bring together students from these two institutions.

Several UIS instructors have already participated in this type of exchange with instructors at Chicago State University. For example, students in the *Internet in American Life* class at UIS and the *Web and Society* class at CSU participated in a weekly combined online discussion forum. The discussions addressed case studies and research questions related to the impact of the Internet on American society. The students in these two classes also were joined by students from a third institution, Columbia University Teachers College in New York, for a synchronous online session with audio exchanges. The online collaboration provided the opportunity for students at these institutions to hear the views of a more diverse group than would have been possible in a traditional class at one of the universities.

In Fall 2005, a UIS philosophy professor participated in a similar joint undertaking with an instructor from the Warsaw School of Economics. Students from a philosophy/economics course at UIS interacted with students from an economics course in Poland. This collaboration is another example of how the classroom learning experience can be enhanced through online initiatives.



#### D. Commission Policies/Procedures Relevant to This Change

The request for approval of UIS online programs is in response to the Higher Learning Commission guidelines on *Changes in Educational Offerings* that state that “Commission approval is required to extend accreditation to include degree programs offered through distance delivery methods.”

#### **II. Factors that Led UIS to Undertake This Change**

The utilization of technology for outreach and as a means for enhancing student learning has been an ongoing practice at UIS. This dates back to earlier years when the university (then Sangamon State University) offered courses that were broadcast over the radio and television. As technology has evolved, so has the university’s utilization of technology as a means to expand student learning opportunities.

The particular interest in online courses and degree programs started under the direction of the leadership at the University of Illinois administration in the mid-1990s. The Vice President for Academic Affairs of the University of Illinois identified online education as a priority and made funds available to the three University of Illinois campuses for the use of technology in the classroom and the development of online courses. In 1997, the University of Illinois established the University of Illinois Online (U of I Online) as a unit in the Vice President for Academic Affairs’ Office to provide coordination and support to the three campuses of the University of Illinois. Its main goal “is to increase the number of high-quality online education programs available to place-bound and time-restricted prospective students in the U.S. and internationally.”

U of I Online provided funding to UIS in 1997 to establish the Office of Technology-Enhanced Learning (OTEL) as a unit to assist faculty in the use of technology. OTEL has played a significant role in advancing the use of technology in UIS teaching and facilitating the development of online courses and degree programs.

UIS offered its first online courses in Fall 1997 and its first online degree program in Fall 1998. The development of other online degree programs followed, including five programs in the humanities and sciences that were initiated with a grant that UIS received from the Sloan Foundation in 2002.

#### A. Relationship Between Proposed Change and Ongoing Planning

The role of technology and online program offerings has been addressed in the university’s long-range vision statements and in the university’s strategic planning process. These issues also are addressed by the Campus Senate and its subcommittee, the Academic Technology Committee.

In AY 2003-2004, UIS created a National Commission on the Future of UIS to address “Where will we be in 10 years?” and “What do we aspire to be in 10 years?” Approximately 200 people, consisting of faculty, staff, students, alumni, and friends of

UIS participated in the 13 task forces that were responsible for developing a vision statement for a particular aspect or unit of UIS. The final report for the National Commission on the Future of UIS noted that technology will have a significant role in the future development of UIS. The Student Body Vision statement noted that “a significantly larger proportion of the student body will be students enrolled in online degree programs ... contributing to the diversity of the student body and enhancing access to UIS’ educational offerings.”

UIS also has an annual strategic planning and budgeting process in which the Campus Planning and Budget Committee submits a *Goals and Objectives Report* to the Campus Senate and administration. In developing that report, the Campus Planning and Budget Committee asks for input and funding priorities from campus leaders, including both academic and administrative units, and uses that information to establish overall funding goals.

In the *2006 Goals and Objectives Report*, the goals were academic quality, enrollment growth, diversity of students, faculty & staff diversity, public service mandate, technology leader, and improved efficiencies. The Campus Planning and Budget Committee used these goals to identify priorities for UIS. The report identified “maintaining a technological edge” as the fifth highest priority for UIS. In describing this priority, the report notes that “UIS on-line instruction has been the source of increased enrollments—it has been successful and should be continued and improved.”

UIS currently is undertaking a more comprehensive long-term strategic planning process to set goals for the next five and ten years. The strategic planning document will address future plans for online education at UIS.

The Academic Technology Committee also plays a role in planning for technology, with an emphasis on how the technology interacts with the academic mission of the university. This committee, which consists of faculty representatives from each of the colleges, meets on a monthly basis with representatives from the UIS computer units and Brookens Library to discuss technology-related issues. Members of this committee assist in the evaluation of technology equipment, software, and policies. The Campus Senate also has sponsored forums addressing issues related to online course offerings and degree programs.

#### B. Needs Analysis Related to This Change

Across the country, online courses and programs are growing in numbers and scope. The Higher Learning Commission notes that “technologically mediated instruction offered at a distance has rapidly become an important component of higher education” ([www.ncahlc.org](http://www.ncahlc.org), accessed September 29, 2005).

UIS has become a leader in online education. This is consistent with UIS’ history of serving nontraditional students and using technology to enhance learning. The university has targeted its online programs based on student demand and the ability of the university

to offer high quality offerings that are comparable to those offered to UIS on-campus students.

Proposals for online programs are prepared by the faculty in the department that will be responsible for developing and implementing the program. Each proposal is required to address the educational and economic viability of the program. This includes issues such as estimated enrollments and the characteristics of students who will be served. (Appendix A lists the guidelines for the development of proposals for new online programs under the Sloan Grant Program.)

### C. Involvement of Various Constituencies in Developing This Proposed Change

The faculty who are responsible for an online program play the lead role in proposing and developing the online program. Their involvement is critical since they will be responsible for delivering the online program and ensuring that it is a high-quality educational program.

University administrative officials also are involved in the review of the online program proposals and ensuring that sufficient resources will be available to develop and sustain the online programs.

## **III. Approvals Obtained to Implement the Proposed Change**

### A. Internal Approvals

A proposal to start an online program is initiated by the academic department that will be responsible for the program. This is the key group in terms of designing, implementing, and evaluating the online programs. The online programs also are subject to college and Provost approval.

For the eight new online programs that will be funded partially through the Sloan grant, UIS has established the following approval process:

1. the department will initiate the request for a new online program;
2. the executive committee of the college will review the proposal in the context of the needs of the college and make a recommendation to the dean;
3. upon recommendation from the dean, the proposal will be submitted to the undergraduate or graduate council to assure that all of the appropriate curricular requirements are met; and
4. the Provost in consultation with the Academic Cabinet will make the final approvals.

### B. External Approvals

Typically external approvals have not been necessary for the establishment of online programs that replicate the same curriculum and hours as the comparable on-campus

degree programs. The same faculty have primary responsibility for delivering and overseeing the online program and the on-campus programs with the main difference being the mode of delivery.

Any online degree program that is not the same as an existing on-campus degree program (e.g., philosophy B.A.) has been (and will be in the future) subject to the same external approvals that are required for any new degree programs, that is, approval by the Campus Senate, the Board of Trustees, and the Illinois Board of Higher Education.

#### **IV. Potential Impact on Challenges Identified by the Commission as Part of or Subsequent to the Last Comprehensive Visit**

##### **A. Challenges Identified**

During the most recent comprehensive visit in 1997, the major concerns that were identified related to strategic planning and graduate education.

##### **B. How UIS Has Addressed the Challenges**

As noted in the team report from a 2001 Focused Visit, the concerns addressed in the 1997 comprehensive visit have been satisfactorily addressed. UIS has implemented an annual strategic planning process and has made revisions to its organizational structure and policies to better address issues associated with graduate education.

The offering of online programs is not expected to have any major impact on UIS' strategic planning process or graduate education policies and structures. However, the issues of the future growth of online education will, of course, be addressed in the university's strategic planning activities.

#### **V. Plans to Implement and Sustain the Proposed Change**

##### **A. Involvement of Appropriately Credentialed Faculty and Experienced Staff**

The UIS strategy for online programs is to *integrate* online teaching with on-campus teaching. Operationally, this means that the same faculty are responsible for teaching both online and on-campus core courses within a particular degree program. This helps assure that the rigor and quality of the online courses will be comparable to the on-campus courses. This also helps facilitate the development of an integrated academic community, both in terms of faculty and students.

Faculty who are interested in teaching in an online program have various forms of assistance available to help them prepare and deliver an online course. The staff of the Office of Technology Enhanced Learning (OTEL) provides workshops and one-on-one assistance to faculty in areas such as how to use the online technology and how to design

an online course to enhance pedagogy. Many of the faculty who teach online have received additional compensation (financed from the Sloan grant or from revenues from the online fees) for the initial development of an online course.

Through the University of Illinois, UIS faculty also have access to online courses about how to teach online. The Making the Virtual Classroom a Reality (MVCR) program offers a series of courses designed to help faculty members obtain the knowledge and skills to teach online. Several UIS faculty have obtained the Master Online Teaching Certification, indicating that they have successfully completed four required course, one elective, and a practicum. A number of other faculty have completed one or more of the courses.

The library staff works with the faculty to place course reading materials on electronic reserves and to ensure that the use of these materials complies with copyright laws. In addition, intellectual property agreements with faculty who develop online courses specifically address the issues of fair use and securing permission for use of copyrighted material.

UIS has hired additional staff at the program level to assist in the administration of the online programs. Most of the online programs have at least one half-time coordinator for the online program. These individuals primarily are responsible for working directly with the students, e.g., answering inquiries from prospective students, assisting students with the admissions process, and working with the students on problems or issues that they encounter after they are enrolled. The coordinators also are available to help students understand and participate in the student grievance procedure. Online program coordinators work closely with the UIS Office of Admissions and the Office of Records and Registration.

The College of Liberal Arts and Science has a College Online Advisory Group that consists of a faculty representative from each online program, the online coordinators, the Dean, and the Dean's assistant. This group addresses issues, such as student entrance policies, enrollment and retention trends in online student cohorts, and capacity building issues related to Web-based delivery, e.g., test proctoring for online students.

UIS also has a Director of Liberal Arts Online Programs who oversees the six program coordinators in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. The Director assists in recruitment and outreach, program development and expansion, and general administrative oversight of the online programs.

UIS technology staff also are a key component of the online programs. The technology staff train faculty and students in the use of online technology and respond to questions from students and faculty.

## B. Administrative Structure

The administrative structure for the online programs is the same as for the on-campus programs. The Chair or Convener of the department and the departmental faculty are responsible for the operation and oversight of the online programs. Most programs also have an online program coordinator.

UIS has developed policies and procedures that direct the administration of test proctoring by faculty members. UIS also partners with other organizations for test proctoring. Through an agreement with the Illinois Virtual Campus and the Illinois Community College Board, UIS has access to a network of community colleges across the State of Illinois that are available to students who need access to a computer lab or a place to take a proctored exam. Proctored exams also can be administered at other types of locations such as a library, a university, or a high school. Online students can propose a particular organization/location and then UIS contacts that organization to obtain approval and make arrangements.

UIS has worked with community colleges in five states other than Illinois and is in the process of identifying additional out-of-state and international sites for the proctoring of exams for online courses. This is especially important to programs such as math, computer science, and philosophy that tend to use exams to assess individual student achievement. Staff track organizations that have proctored exams for UIS' online students and make this information available to students and faculty members as they continue to integrate test proctoring into course work.

The campus utilizes Blackboard and Oracle databases to support the online courses. The campus technology unit oversees the contract with Blackboard and ensures the reliability of the servers. To date, the Blackboard system has been very reliable. The system has been down due to scheduled maintenance, but it has not had any unplanned downtime.

Most of the major components of the system are replicated and housed in two different buildings. Currently both buildings are on the UIS campus; however, in the future one of the backup locations will be in the Chicago area. The university has a back-up power source that is specifically designated for the Blackboard system. The computer hardware that supports the online courses is located in a secure area that has restricted access.

The university uses the latest technology to prevent damage from hackers and uses a strong authentication system for ensuring appropriate access to Blackboard. The authentication system is role based with users only seeing what is relevant to their particular use, e.g., the student view is different from the faculty view.

The technology staff create Blackboard accounts and train faculty and students on the use of Blackboard. The Office of Technology Enhanced Learning (OTEL) offers workshops and one-on-one assistance to faculty regarding how to use the online technology and how to address the pedagogical aspects of teaching online. At the beginning of each semester,

the university's technology unit provides training for students on how to use Blackboard. There also is an online tutorial on how to use Blackboard and a list of frequently asked questions (FAQs). Students and faculty also have access to a Help Desk that is staffed by individuals knowledgeable in the hardware, software, and delivery systems associated with the online programs.

### C. Learning Resources and Support Services

Students who are enrolled in a UIS online program have access to a variety of learning resources and support services to help them address their learning needs and to obtain information about the university and its policies and procedures. This includes assistance from the course instructor, online program coordinators, online peer tutors, the UIS Help Desk, the Center for Teaching and Learning, and the library.

The online faculty and online program coordinators have the most direct contact with the students. The faculty have the primary responsibility for helping the students learn the course material. Online faculty also can play a key role in referring the student to other sources of assistance or information. The online program coordinators, who are assigned to work with particular academic programs, are responsible for helping students obtain information about the online programs, apply to the programs, and register for online courses. The advising function is the responsibility of either the faculty advisor or the online program coordinator, depending on the program.

During 2004-2005, UIS introduced the use of students to act as online peer tutors in some online courses. These students typically have already taken and performed well in the course. Their role as peer tutors is to help the online students in a manner similar to the types of assistance a fellow student in an on-campus class might provide.

Enrolled students have access to a Help Desk which is operated by UIS' Campus Technology Services. The Help Desk is open extended hours including evenings and some weekend hours. It is staffed by individuals who can answer technology-related questions or refer students to the appropriate place if they are unable to help the student. Help Desk assistance is available by phone, as well as by email.

Students can contact the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) for assistance with the academic aspects of online courses. Students who need help with writing, math, or MS Office software can receive assistance in an online format using Blackboard tools such as the discussion board. CTL also maintains a website that contains handouts that may be useful to online students on topics such as writing a literature review or how to study for an essay exam.

The pride the campus takes in offering comparable academic support to online students and on-campus students is evidenced through the online services offered through the university's Brookens Library. Through a significant investment by the university, the resources of the library, including its databases of online journals and magazines and books, are available through the Internet. Students can request a book through Illnet

Online (a consortium of libraries in Illinois) and then pick up the book at any of the Illnet libraries. Students who live more than 30 miles away from the campus can request a photocopy of a journal article from the Illnet library collections.

The library also provides a variety of other services to online students. Many of the readings for online course are provided electronically through Blackboard and are subject to the relevant copyright laws. The library's website also has online tutorials on topics such as how to do research. In addition, the library offers an online course on library research methods. This course helps students learn how to use printed and electronic resources that provide access to information. Students learn about how to plan an effective research strategy and find books, journal articles, data, Internet resources, and other sources of information.

Online students who want help from a reference librarian can call the reference desk or email a reference librarian. The latter can be requested by clicking on "Ask a Librarian" on the library's webpage. Students also can access a virtual reference service in which they can communicate in real time with a reference librarian. This service is being provided through the library at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign through a contractual agreement with UIS.

The University's academic and businesses services also are available online. Through the university's website, students can apply for admissions, access the UIS catalog, register for classes, pay their bills, and order textbooks. Students also can receive career services or apply for financial assistance online.

The UIS student handbook, which addresses academic services, campus services, student life, campus policies, and various other issues, also is available online. It covers a broad range of topics, such as advising, library services, career services, disabled services, and student grievance and disciplinary policies.

UIS has an online orientation website for new and existing students. This website provides students with information on a variety of topics related to online learning, such as a tutorial on Blackboard, information on online services offered through the library and Center for Teaching & Learning, and how to order books online through the campus bookstore.

UIS is committed to providing access for online students to be a part of activities that occur on campus. The university provides web casts of university events such as speakers, convocation, sports events, and graduation. In most cases, students can either watch these webcasts live or view them later through the university's website. Online coordinators help keep online students informed about these events.



#### D. Financial Data That Document UIS' Capacity to Implement and Sustain the Proposed Change

The budget plans for the online programs are prepared on a program-by-program basis. Each department that proposes an online program is responsible for providing projections of student enrollment, tuition and fee revenue, and estimates for one-time and ongoing costs. Each online program is expected to be self-sustaining in that the revenue generated from online tuition and fees is expected to cover the related online instructional and staff support costs.

In addition to paying e-tuition, students who enroll in online programs are required to pay an online fee of \$25 per credit hour. Thirty percent of the fee revenue is allocated to the Office of Technology Enhanced Learning, five percent is allocated to the library, and the remainder is split evenly among the college that offered the online course and the college in which the online major resides. These funds are used to support online programs.

#### E. Timeline to Implement the Change

Table 1 (see page 2) shows the years in which each of the existing online degree programs was started. The six new online programs that have been approved (see page 2) will be phased in over the next three years. At least two new additional online programs are expected to be approved in the 2005-2006 academic year.

This timeline allows the university to develop new online programs where sufficient student demand exists. It also facilitates Sloan grant funding for faculty to develop online courses and to cover the initial start-up costs of the new online programs.

#### F. Strategies for Maintaining Academic Quality

UIS is committed to ensuring that the quality of its online degree programs is comparable to the quality of its on-campus degree programs. As previously stated, this is facilitated through an approach that offers the same curriculum taught primarily by the same faculty for both on-campus and online degree programs.

The university also manages the enrollment in the online programs. As new programs are proposed, targeted enrollment levels are developed. During implementation, if the demand for a program exceeds the targeted levels, the program will analyze its options. This may include raising the admissions criteria to be more selective or expanding the program enrollment if sufficient resources are available to support that option.

Additional quality control issues are addressed at the course level. Maximum targeted enrollment levels have been established for the online sections of a course. The intent is for these classes to have a maximum of 15-25 students, depending on the nature of the course. Student evaluations also are used to evaluate individual courses and instructors. The online course evaluations are the same as the on-campus course evaluations;

however, they are administered online. (On-campus course instructors have the option of using online or on-campus course evaluations.)

The other major approach used to monitor the effectiveness of the online programs is the assessment of student learning outcomes. The university's approach to the assessment of student learning outcomes is described in Section VI.

## **VI. Organization's Strategies to Evaluate the Proposed Change**

### **A. Measures UIS will Use to Document Achievement of Expected Outcomes**

UIS utilizes various measures to evaluate the online programs, including (1) enrollment data, (2) retention and degree completion data, and (3) data on assessment of student learning outcomes. The university tracks the total number of students enrolled in online programs, the total number of credit hours generated in online courses, and the characteristics of students enrolled in online programs compared to those of students enrolled in on-campus programs. The university also tracks online enrollment data on a program-by-program basis.

With recent improvements in the student data system, the university is now able to start monitoring student retention and graduation rates in the online programs. As the online programs mature, the university plans to compare the retention and graduation rates for online *programs* to the rates for on-campus programs.

The university also is monitoring retention rates for online *courses*. In spring 2005, the student retention rate for UIS online courses was 90.8%. This compares favorably to the preliminary results from a recent study conducted by the University of Wisconsin-Extension (2005) that found that among the survey respondents who track course completion rates, 55% had online completion rates in excess of 80%, while 35% had rates between 91% and 100%.

### **B. How Assessment of Student Learning is Integrated into the Online Degree Program**

UIS has made a major commitment to the assessment of student learning outcomes. Each program is expected to "Take a Second Look" -- to evaluate individual student performance and then go back to analyze the collective performance of the students. The results of that "second look" are used to identify changes that may enhance the quality of the program.

Each academic program is responsible for (1) the development of student learning outcomes for each of its degree programs, and (2) the identification/development of one or more assessment activities that are linked to those outcomes. Each online program has the same student learning outcomes as the comparable on-campus program.

The importance of the assessment of student learning outcomes for online programs is emphasized under the Educational Viability section of the Sloan II online proposal guidelines (see Appendix A). The guidelines ask that particular attention be paid to a number of items, one of which is “that the program has clearly stated student learning outcomes and appropriate mechanisms in place for their assessment.”

The existing online programs are utilizing various mechanisms to assess student learning outcomes. Some programs are utilizing tests, while most others are using some form of closure paper, such as a senior paper or master’s thesis/project, as the major assessment tool. At least one program has started using electronic portfolios to assist in the assessment process.

During the summer of 2004, the university undertook a review of various electronic portfolio software products that could be used to assist in the assessment of student learning outcomes. After a careful comparison of the products and their features, a decision was made to recommend adoption of a software product called TaskStream. TaskStream helps facilitate the electronic submission of materials (e.g., lesson plans, papers) prepared by students and has a feature that allows faculty to evaluate individual students and then to look across student results for assessment purposes.

The Master of Arts in Teacher Leadership has started to use TaskStream and other programs/instructors are experimenting with or considering using it. The Office of Technology Enhanced Learning is sponsoring funding for several faculty members who are utilizing TaskStream to conduct research on the effectiveness of this software. The findings from these research projects will be shared with the campus community.

UIS faculty and staff continue to explore other ways to effectively implement systems for assessing student learning outcomes in both on-campus and in online programs. For example, during the summer of 2005, several UIS faculty attended a workshop at Northern Illinois University titled “Assessment of Online/Hybrid Course and Curricula: Concepts, Tools, and Frameworks.” The UIS technology staff also have identified and procured software tools, such as Elluminate, that can be used to add voice transmission/interactions to the assessment mechanism options for online programs.

The selection of appropriate assessment tools is important, but the real value from an assessment system comes in the feedback loop when the assessment results are used to make changes to the programs. Although many UIS academic programs have been informally doing this, the programs are now expected to systematize their approaches and to document how assessment findings are being used to make improvements to the programs. For the past two years, each academic degree program has been asked to submit an annual report that describes the program’s student learning outcomes, the mechanisms that are used to assess those outcomes, and how the results have been or will be used to make improvements to the program.

## **Conclusion**

The development and delivery of online programs at UIS allows the university to offer its programs to a broader range of students. The online programs have made higher education accessible to students whose geographical location or personal responsibilities might otherwise preclude them from pursuing a university degree. Online programs also provide an opportunity for UIS to further examine how dedicated teachers and advanced technology can be used together to enhance student learning.

UIS is committed to ensuring that its online programs are of the same high quality as its on-campus programs. This is facilitated by having the online programs utilize the same curriculum and primarily the same faculty as the comparable on-campus programs. Other key components to UIS' approach to quality control include the tracking of online student enrollment and retention/degree completion and the assessment of student learning outcomes.

## APPENDIX A

### Sloan Grant Proposal Development Guidelines

The proposal should begin with a description of the program to be delivered. Any differences between the scope of the program as it has been delivered on campus and the proposed online degree should be clearly identified. The use of instructional methods other than online (e.g. blended courses) should also be described. The remainder of the proposal should address issues of educational and economic viability. Suggestions for appropriate documentation are offered below.

#### **Educational Viability**

The educational viability of the proposals will be evaluated by program committees, the college curriculum committees, the graduate and undergraduate councils, and, if necessary, by the Senate under their existing procedures and criteria. The proposal should include formal approvals from the appropriate program and college committees.

In this case, we would ask that particular attention be paid to the following items:

- That the program has clearly stated student learning outcomes and appropriate mechanisms in place for their assessment. Evidence of prior success with the implementation of an effective assessment program would be significant.
- A detailed multiyear course schedule that will allow both new online and existing students to progress towards the degree in a timely fashion. The schedule needs to be adequate for the number of students anticipated and the program needs to be committed to its delivery.
- A detailed schedule for the development and deployment of the courses required in an online format. Evidence of the program's commitment to online instruction would be helpful.
- A description of characteristics of the students the online program will serve. Admission criteria that will be used to select among applicants should be described.
- The extent to which arrangements have been made to provide courses required outside the major, if any.
- Issues of accreditation, if applicable. Is the program currently accredited? What will be the impact of online delivery on accreditation?

- Evidence that adequate plans have been made for advising and other support services required by the program's students.

## **Economic Viability**

### **Revenue**

- Total enrollment and credit hour projections based on the rate at which students will be admitted, the assumptions made about retention and the rate of progress towards the degree.
- Projections for tuition and fees charged. A rationale for differential tuition, if proposed.
- Evidence of student demand for the online program, accompanied by enrollment history for the existing program and any prior online offerings, if applicable.
- Total revenue projections based on the information above.

### **Expenses**

A budget for the one time grant funds to include course development and other startup expenses. (Typically ten \$6,000 course development stipends, plus \$20,000 for staff support).

An ongoing budget plan that would allow the program to be delivered indefinitely, to include:

- Projections for additional faculty required to support the multiyear course schedule as proposed for new online and existing students. Typically, new faculty would not teach entirely online, but rather would enable the program to share the responsibility for the new and existing offerings.
- Projections for support staff requirements and other operating budget requirements (e.g. equipment, marketing expenses, etc.).
- Projections for ongoing faculty development and curriculum development.

## **Other General Considerations**

- The relationship of the proposal to UIS and/or IBHE priorities.
- Evidence of societal need, including employment prospects for graduates.
- Other materials as deemed appropriate by the proposing unit.