

“Special SAS Reconciliation Project” Questions

December 13, 2005

Youngstown State University

Please refer to the accompanying cover letter for an explanation of the purpose and expectations of this project. Additionally, please provide concise but comprehensive responses to the questions.

Institution’s history with distance education

1. Briefly describe your institution's experience with distance education.

In 1998, the North Central Association approved Youngstown State University to offer existing courses and programs within a 100-mile radius of campus in Ohio and the three adjoining counties in western Pennsylvania. For several years, the then-existing Allied Health Program at Youngstown State University offered courses to students at a distance via traditional face-to-face instruction and two-way interactive video conferencing (IVC).

The Allied Health Program accepts students with hospital-based (for example RN or LPN diploma programs) or undergraduate education in various health care specialties such as nursing, respiratory care, dental hygiene, emergency medical technology, medical assisting, and many others. In the early stages of this degree-completion program, distance education was accomplished by having faculty travel to various locations, teaching students in a traditional face-to-face manner. In 1999, the use of interactive two-way video conferencing began to be used, allowing instructors to interact with students at multiple locations simultaneously.

The use of WebCT (Web Course Tools), a web-based course management system, became popular at YSU in the year 2000, predominantly to enhance courses taught face-to-face and then applied to classes taught over two-way interactive video conferencing systems. In 2001 and 2002, several instructors taught courses using WebCT to enhance courses being taught onsite or using two-way interactive video conferencing. In 2002, one course in Youngstown State University’s Allied Health program offered students the option of completing the course online (using WebCT) or through a combination of online instruction and IVC. Many students enrolled in this course began to complete the course predominantly using the asynchronous online learning environment.

In 2003, the Allied Health program began to develop asynchronous online versions of many courses that had previously been offered via IVC or web-enhanced IVC. This rapid development of asynchronous web-based courses was enabled in part due to funding provided by a grant from the Ohio Learning Network (OLN), the state’s shared online course delivery system. In fall semester of 2004, nearly all courses required to complete this degree were available though IVC and online. The final course required to complete the Allied Health major was offered online for the first time in the fall semester of 2005.

The Masters in Health & Human Services program followed a similar development path, but without grant funding. The courses in this program allow students the option of attending web-enhanced IVC courses or completing the courses through asynchronous online instruction, using WebCT as the course management system. Students may elect to take each course entirely online, through IVC, or through a combination of IVC and online. Each course is taught by the same instructor. This program has gradually developed all courses in an online format, offering

students the option, since spring semester 2003, of completing courses online or attending synchronous class sessions—with a goal of enabling all required courses to be completed online.

Institutional planning for distance education

2. How did you determine the need for a distance education program? If you offered the program(s) synchronously already, how did you decide to start offering asynchronous program(s) via distance education?

The need for the program (offered synchronously at first) was determined through surveys done at each site. The surveys showed overwhelming interest in synchronous program offerings. Asynchronous delivery of the program came about as a result of increasing requests by students and the popularity of this mode of delivery. This mode also provided for growth of the program and was projected to be cost-effective.

3. How did you plan for expansion into distance education? Who is involved? How do new ideas and initiatives originate, and how are they examined and evaluated?

Expansion into distance learning was planned to take place over a period of two years, with courses being developed by faculty members who would serve as content experts and instructional designers. Instructional design support was to be provided, as needed, by YSU's Instructional Technology Center (initially known as the Center for Teaching and Learning Technology). Student help was added to the Instructional Technology Center, and the Instructional Technology Specialist at the Center was notified of the need for increased support for the courses that would be developed. Expansion of hours for technical support through the help desk was planned. Web-based support for students was considered and implemented.

The position of Director of Distance Learning for the College of Health and Human Services was created by the Dean of the college to help coordinate distance learning, assist with identifying necessary resources, and provide technical assistance and support for faculty engaged in distance learning. Student support services and other services, such as access to library materials, were considered in the planning process. Partner institutions were made aware of plans to offer online instruction; and marketing efforts (using brochures and site visits as well as online communications) were planned and initiated.

Planning for distance learning is currently carried out by the Dean of the Bitonte College of Health and Human Services, the Director of Distance Learning for the college, and faculty within the college who are actively involved in distance learning and who contribute on an ongoing basis. Advisory Committee input for the BSAS in Allied Health program was considered in scheduling online courses that were added to the already-present video conferencing courses. Student input was solicited in the planning process and continues to be provided and considered on an ongoing basis. Students expressed an interest in additional online course offerings after a few courses were offered in this fashion. Media & Academic Computing, Computer Services, Network Services and other university offices are involved in planning delivery of the courses.

New ideas and initiatives originate from a variety of sources, including ideas and insight gained from attendance at conferences, evaluation of distance learning research, and reviews of current literature. New initiatives and ideas are also initiated in response to feedback from

partner institutions, faculty engaged in distance learning, and students who are enrolled in online courses.

Ideas and initiatives are discussed by faculty members, program directors, department chairpersons, the Director of Distance Learning, the Dean of the Bitonte College of Health and Human Services, program advisory committees, and partner institutions. Initiatives are evaluated by appropriate parties. When implemented, they are evaluated by appropriate means, including consideration of impact on budget, feedback from students, feedback from partner institutions, etc.

4. What is your planning schedule (e.g., the next six months, three years) for distance education? Why do you think this is appropriate?

The Dean and the Director of Distance Learning for the Bitonte College of Health and Human Services will continue to meet monthly to discuss distance education and assess progress toward relevant technology initiatives outlined in the university's Technology Master Plan, which was approved in 2003. At least annual planning meetings are held with distance learning partner institutions. Meetings occur frequently between Youngstown State University's Director of Media & Academic Computing (MAC), the Director of Distance Learning for YSU's Bitonte College of Health and Human Services, and the Instructional Technology Specialist at YSU's Instructional Technology Center to discuss faculty training and planning issues related to new distance technology (such as migration to WebCT Vista). More frequent planning (face-to-face or conducted asynchronously through e-mail) takes place as needed, and regular, additional planning is anticipated over the next three years to consider growth in distance learning programs and enrollment, implementation of additional online services for students and faculty, and procedures necessary to meet requirements anticipated in the Higher Education Reauthorization Act.

The university recently provided strategic-initiative funding for—and will soon post—a position for a campus-wide Distance Learning Coordinator, and the individual appointed will have responsibility for working with all interested individuals and colleges in planning future distance education programs and initiatives. Now that distance education is growing and expanding beyond the College of Health and Human Services, a campus-wide coordinator is important to ensure that distance education programs develop and are assessed systematically and that sufficient funds, technology, and human resources are available.

5. How did you ensure that financial planning and budgeting for your distance education programs was realistic? How do you project revenues and expenses?

As courses and programs were approved for online delivery, the Dean of the College of Health and Human Services, with agreement of the President and Provost, initiated the programs and provided for budgeting needs. The Dean now holds the budget for existing distance programs. Revenues and expenses are tracked by a financial expert in the Provost's Office (Marilyn Ward, with input from the Dean) and used to project future revenues and expenses.

6. How do you assure that promotion and marketing of your online programs stay in balance with your actual resources and technical capabilities? How did you determine the adequacy of your marketing and promotional strategies for the distance education programs?

Marketing is done by the regular marketing unit of the University. Also, each institution to which we deliver programming markets the program at that institution, using shared revenue generated by students at each site. Additional marketing/promotional activities include informational/recruiting visits to partner institutions a few times each year. These sessions are conducted by program directors and the Academic Advisor/Health Professions representative. Program promotion is also conducted informally by students enrolled in, and who have graduated from, the programs involved. The remaining marketing is through brochures and information available online. Marketing is effectively measured by outcomes and growth that have occurred since inception of the programs.

Curriculum and Instructional Design

7. How do you assure good instructional design in your online education? How are your faculty involved in the instructional design process?

Faculty members are provided opportunities for training in instructional design, and faculty serve as designers for nearly all online courses. Faculty members designing and teaching online are required to attend an orientation session through the Instructional Technology Center prior to conducting distance learning. There, information regarding the use of WebCT and online pedagogy is presented, including essential elements of course design, teaching practices, etc. Faculty who teach online courses also have available the resources of YSU's more general (as opposed to simply technology-oriented) Center for Teaching and Learning, known as CATALYST. The resources of both centers are available throughout each term.

Feedback about teaching, course design, and other course parameters is obtained through anonymous student evaluations of teaching, on the schedule set for all courses and faculty by university policy. Feedback is reviewed by faculty, program directors, the department chairperson. Faculty members teaching online courses, like faculty teaching other courses, are evaluated by the department chairperson on the schedule set by university policy.

8. What processes and procedures are you using for technology maintenance, upgrades, back up, remote services, and for communicating changes in software, hardware or technical systems to students and faculty?

A technology fee collected at YSU augments technology maintenance and upgrades. Technology expenditures are guided by established practices (e.g., periodic renewal of software licenses and hardware maintenance) and the Technology Master Plan. Lab computers are imaged, and a centralized backup system, including a tape library, is in place for servers and/or mission-critical data. Remote services are provided via web-based applications, via dial-in, and through collaboration with other institutions. Significant changes in technology are communicated primarily by the campus e-mail system, the main YSU web site, and the YSU Tech Desk web site and via newsletters and publications (flyers, memos, etc).

9. How do you make sure that you provide convenient, reliable, and timely services to students or faculty needing technical assistance, and how do you communicate information about these services? What technical support services are provided?

Students are provided technical assistance via the university's Tech (Help) Desk, WebCT online help, YSU's Instructional Technology Center, faculty members, a WebCT tutorial course

that is available online, and the Director of Distance Learning for the Bitonte College of Health and Human Services.

Students in online courses are notified about resources for technical assistance through communications mailed to them prior to the start of the semester, through course communications, and through information on university web sites.

Faculty technical assistance is provided via the Tech Desk, WebCT online help, the Instructional Technology Center, and the Director of Distance Learning for the Bitonte College of Health and Human Services.

Faculty members are notified through orientation sessions for new faculty, orientation sessions for faculty teaching online courses, communications via e-mail from the Instructional Technology Center, web information provided by the YSU Tech Desk, and information on university web sites.

Technology services are provided via the YSU Tech Desk as a first contact, augmented by software specialists assigned to various campus buildings and other support partners from Media & Academic Computing, Computer Services, Network Services, and Electronic Maintenance Services. A formal incident/work order system is in place to facilitate communications between technical support personnel. The Tech Desk was moved to a more central location on campus during the past year, and evening and weekend hours were added. The operation of the Instructional Technology Center (ITC) extends into the evening one day a week. Both the Tech Desk and the ITC maintain web sites enumerating services. Services include training, hardware/software consultation, support documentation, installation, set-up, and repair. Support is offered via phone, via e-mail, and in-person on campus. Remote support extends to off-campus use of faculty-/student-owned technology for academic purposes. Remote sales of software are supported through the YSU Bookstore.

10. What is your institution's experience with collaboration in asynchronous delivery? In what ways do you currently collaborate with other organizations (within or outside of your state) in asynchronous delivery?

The College of Health and Human Services has partnered with several institutions within the state to deliver online as well as interactive video courses. The partners currently involved in online learning programs include Cuyahoga Community College, Lorain County Community College, and North Central State.

A collaboration through the Ohio Learning Network (OLN) between YSU, KSU, and Rio Community college supports the delivery of course content using the WebCT Vista product. Also, the Bitonte College of Health and Human Services has recently acquired online tutoring services provided by Smart Thinking through an agreement with the Ohio Learning Network.

Through initiatives such as Internet 2 and Ohio's Third Frontier and recent acquisition of a hardware bridge for IDL, YSU strives to enhance methods of service delivery and connectivity. YSU continues to be active in new initiatives such as the collaborative OLN Open Source pilot project in the interest of cost-beneficial services to faculty and students. A monthly Technology Services meeting between technical support personnel, coordinated by the Tech Desk, serves as a formal vehicle for communications beyond individual contacts to the Tech Desk concerning issues such as the use of online services.

Prospective students and existing students, including students taking courses asynchronously, can participate in the state's collaborative online Degree Audit and Course

Applicability Systems, which allow students and their advisors to see how a student's courses apply to programs at YSU and elsewhere in the state.

11. What partnerships or agreements (e.g., Web Instructional Authorware or vendors for electronically delivered courses such as ALS, Coast, E-College, Technical Agreements-Eduprise, Oracle, Cisco) support your delivery of instruction? How do you ensure students can use your online services effectively?

Synchronous delivery of the program was well supported here at YSU by a continuing grant for equipment. Each site, by contract between YSU and the site, provides for adequate funding at each site. Income from tuition adequately provides income for delivery of courses. WebCT is the primary software used for delivering courses.

Students are trained and largely have the skills necessary to use online services before they take our classes. An online orientation course, "WebCT Can Be Fun," is in place to orient students to the technology commonly used in the online courses. Students are informed of the availability of this course through notice sent by US mail to registered online students prior to the start of each semester, and through online information. Completion of this course provides students with information on various tools common to courses using WebCT and requires students to perform skills such as sending mail, checking grades, posting attachments, submitting assignments, etc.

Institutional Staffing and Faculty Support

12. How do you staff online education? How does this differ from your processes for staffing traditional programs?

Primarily existing full-time and part-time faculty members are employed to teach the online courses. Faculty who teach students at a distance, whether online or using IVC, are provided additional training and an orientation to online and/or IVC instruction provided by the Director of Distance Learning and/or the Instructional Technology Center.

In accordance with the university's union agreement with faculty, faculty who teach online are offered an incentive/compensation to do so and have the right to refuse to teach online courses, as we want only instructors who are genuinely interested in teaching online to do so. Those who teach students at a distance typically receive additional workload (generally at least one additional workload hour is provided the first time the faculty member is developing an online course, and traditionally an additional workload hour has been added to the workload associated with the course each time it is taught), which often results in extra compensation due to overload. A process is in place to negotiate additional workload through the faculty union agreement. Although this agreement does not officially cover part-time faculty, who are not members of the bargaining unit, the college has provided the same additional workload for both full-time and part-time faculty members.

13. What is your process for selecting, training, and orienting faculty for electronically delivered courses and programs? What professional development, support, or release time do you provide for faculty teaching online? How do you include adjunct and part-time faculty?

Faculty members are chosen based on their knowledge of the course material and their willingness to place the course online. An orientation is provided for new faculty, and if a faculty

member requires a refresher course, it is available through the Instructional Technology Center staff. Bitonte College of Health and Human Services full-time and part-time faculty members have traditionally received at least one additional workload hour for each online course they are teaching. Additional hours of workload are provided for faculty members developing online courses.

Funding to support travel and professional development are provided to faculty members and the Director of Distance Learning for the college.

The Instructional Technology Center aids faculty in integrating online instruction into their curriculum by offering one-on-one and group training in WebCT Vista, as well as providing instructional documentation concerning the use of Vista on the ITC's Vista Help Site.

To prepare faculty for online instruction, the ITC provides comprehensive online WebCT Vista documentation, geared toward faculty and students alike, for most of Vista's tools. To ensure that the YSU community receives the greatest benefit from this software, the ITC administers one-on-one and group training sessions to increase proficiency in the use of Vista's many tools and functions.

During Vista training, faculty receive hands-on training with WebCT Vista's tools, as well as information about theory behind offering online materials, teaching online courses, and getting students to utilize the software effectively.

The ITC also offers phone support and on-demand workshops to provide flexible training in using online educational technology.

14. How do you assure copyright compliance and keep online faculty aware of institutional policies on using the intellectual property of others?

Currently, no mechanism is in place to *assure* copyright compliance for materials in online courses. Copyright compliance and the need to better understand, educate, and inform others of copyright issues related to online instruction have recently received increased attention at YSU. Plans are underway to focus additional resources and high priority on this issue.

Faculty members are, however, made aware of the need to adhere to institutional policies at the time they are hired. The institutional policy on the Use of Computing Resources (Policy Number 4009.01), though not specifically designed for online instruction, addresses intellectual property and copyright issues:

“All individuals using University computing resources, whether affiliated with the University or not, and all uses of those resources, whether on campus or from remote locations, must:

Comply with all federal, state, and other applicable laws, all applicable University policies, procedures, and regulations, and all applicable contractual and license agreements, including, but not limited to such matters as: copyright; computer fraud and abuse; defamation; ethics; right to privacy; obscenity, child pornography, and indecency; sexual, racial, and other forms of harassment. Additional policies may apply to specific computers, systems, or networks provided or operated by departments within the University.”

A Handbook on Ownership of Intellectual Property was developed in November 2005. This handbook describes and references appropriate regulations and laws pertaining to copyright and intellectual property. This handbook will be distributed to all faculty members, department chairs, and deans, once approved by the University Board of Trustees.

Student Support

15. How have you assured that online students have access to necessary student and support services (e.g., institutional information, application for admission, registration, tutoring or academic support, advising, financial aid, tuition payment, career counseling and placement, library resources), and how is information about using these services relayed? How have you measured and promoted interactions among students and faculty (e.g., email, online chats, discussion groups, phone or streaming audio, “office hours,” cyber buddies/mentors and tutors)?

Institutional information, along with information about the following services, is available and communicated to students in multiple ways, including discussions between students and faculty members, information provided by academic advisors, as well as through college and department web sites (see <http://bchhs.yosu.edu/dhp/ahlth/distance-education.htm> and <http://bchhs.yosu.edu/dhp/ahlth/StudentServices.htm>), program brochures, e-mail, and other communications with students.

- Registration information and services are provided by the Office of Registration. They are available online at <http://www.yosu.edu/orcr/orcr.shtml>.
- Tutoring or academic support – Tutoring and academic support are available through YSU’s Center for Student Progress. Information regarding the services provided through the center is available at <http://www.cc.yosu.edu/csp/> and <http://www.cc.yosu.edu/csp/stututserv.htm>. Smart Thinking, a commercial service that provides tutorial services online for areas such as writing and mathematics, has recently been acquired through the Ohio Learning Network as an additional service to provide tutorial services during expanded hours, especially during the evening and on weekends.
- Advising – Advising is provided in person and online by the faculty, the program director, and the Academic Advisor/Health Professions representative. Jody Patrick (the college’s head advisor) and the Academic Advisor/Health Professions representative review records and conduct final graduation evaluation. Students are required to be advised by an academic advisor prior to their initial registration for courses. Advisement is conducted face-to-face, by phone, or over video advising systems.
- Financial Aid – Information and services are provided through the office of Financial Aid and Scholarships.
- Tuition Payment – Students can pay tuition by credit card over the web.
- Career Counseling – Career counseling is available through YSU Career Services.
- Placement – Placement tests are required for entrance into Math and English General Education Requirement (GER) courses at YSU. Since students in the BSAS online degree-completion program usually transfer in their Math and English courses from accredited colleges or universities, they take the placement tests required for those

institutions. Students taking asynchronous courses who are taking their General Education requirements from YSU (rather than transferring General Education courses from elsewhere) take the placement tests at the YSU testing facilities.

- Library Resources – Library Resources are provided to students through YSU’s Maag Library and the state’s online/interlibrary loan system, known as OhioLINK. Students learning at a distance are provided YSU library system bar codes, so that they can access services, books, articles, research data bases, collections, multimedia, etc. that are restricted to use by YSU students. Barcodes are requested for students at a distance through the Academic Advisor/Health Professions representative and program directors. Information and the bar code are sent to students via US mail. Students may order library materials through OhioLINK and pick them up at a library near them.

16. How do you track the retention rates of students enrolled in asynchronously delivered programs? How do the retention rates of these students differ from those of students enrolled in synchronously delivered programs?

Because YSU’s asynchronous programs are so new, because they are “mixed” (i.e., some students take the courses synchronously and some take them asynchronously), and because so many individual students take both synchronous and asynchronous courses, we have not yet developed a system for tracking retention of solely-asynchronous course takers. We need to develop such a system before we can compare retention of students enrolled in asynchronously delivered programs with that of students in synchronously delivered programs. Overall retention (i.e., the number of students who re-enrolled through the 14th day of any one of the subsequent 5 semesters) for the Masters of Health and Human Services from winter 1998 through summer 2005 was 89.08%. The overall retention for the BSAS in Allied Health was 78.24%.

17. How do you assure the protection of student identity and their personal information?

Authentication based on a 4-digit pin and/or password and/or access using a patron id unique to YSU is required for data-sensitive YSU systems and services. Use of the Social Security Number as a system identifier has been eliminated from many in-house applications. A database guardian–concept has long been established practice at YSU in granting access to various student and non-student data. Information is used in centralized ad-hoc reports, specifying the data are for YSU use only. A Service Level Agreement with collaboration partners defines the terms of (non) use of data stored off-site for the course management system. FERPA guidelines are published in the YSU *Undergraduate Bulletin* and followed in institutional practices.

Evaluation and Assessment

18. How do you evaluate the asynchronous courses and programs (revenues, expenses, services provided, etc.) you offer?

All courses (synchronous and asynchronous) at Youngstown State University are evaluated at least annually by students enrolled in the course. Anonymous evaluations of teaching and learning are completed online by students enrolled in the course. These are conducted near the end of the academic term in which the course is offered. The evaluation results are accessible through the Human Resources Department, and a summary report is sent to each faculty member, program director, and department chairperson. The evaluation instrument

consists of 22 items using a Likert scale rating system, one yes/no response item, and two items allowing a narrative response.

Traditional synchronous courses are evaluated using a paper scan sheet, while online evaluations are used for asynchronous courses. All university academic programs are also required to submit assessment data annually and to undergo full program review on a five-to-seven-year cycle.

Research suggests that there are differences in student response rates for evaluations conducted online compared to those using a more traditional paper format. Evaluations conducted online have yielded lower student response rates than those utilizing paper or scan sheets. Technology problems may also affect learners' ratings for both the course and instructor. These issues are currently being discussed by a committee charged with developing a new evaluation system to be used for online courses. We expect that the new system will evaluate teaching and learning issues, including instructor performance and course content, etc., as well as technology related issues and the impact they may have on students' learning.

Evaluation of revenues, expenses, and services provided is conducted by the college offering the online programs, program review committees, and university administrators.

19. How do you encourage and ensure continuous improvement of distance education programs?

All programs at Youngstown State University are required to have student learning outcomes and multiple outcomes-assessment measures in place. These outcomes are unique to each program, and each program must report assessment data, including a report on how analysis of previous data has been used to improve the program, to the university-wide Assessment Council once a year. Students participating in asynchronous courses are expected to achieve and exhibit the same program-specific learning outcomes as those participating in synchronous and traditional courses.

In addition, distance learning programs will undergo cyclical program review just as other programs do. Traditionally, our program review process has involved analysis of many different kinds of program-specific student and faculty data, with both the department and a central university committee making suggestions for program improvements. An ad hoc committee is currently evaluating how YSU's program-review structure can be revised and tied more closely to budgeting and planning processes, thus providing additional "encouragement" for continuous improvement.

20. How do you assess the learning of the students you educate in your asynchronously delivered programs to ensure that they achieve the levels of performance you expect? What mechanisms do you use? How do they differ from techniques used to assess and evaluate traditional synchronously delivered instruction? How is the difference in delivery addressed?

Assessment of student learning within online courses is conducted by program faculty, using both "classroom-embedded" assessment and program-specific assessment of student learning outcomes. The current online courses developed from courses conducted in a traditional synchronous fashion. The assessments utilized in the online versions of the courses are similar to those used in the onsite and IVC versions of these courses. Examples of "classroom-embedded" assessments utilized in our online courses include quizzes/exams (conducted online using the

quiz tool in WebCT), case scenarios, projects, research papers, creation of instructional media, student presentations (conducted using narrated PowerPoint, video and audio), etc.

As noted in the response to question number 19, all programs at Youngstown State University are required to have student learning outcomes and multiple outcomes-assessment measures in place. These outcomes are unique to each program, and each program reports assessment data, including a report on how analysis of previous data has been used to improve the program, to the university-wide Assessment Council once a year. Students participating in asynchronous courses are expected to exhibit the same program-specific learning outcomes as those participating in synchronous and traditional courses.

Programs involved in distance learning evaluate learning and program outcomes in the same manner as courses taught in a more traditional, face-to-face manner, although (as noted above) the technology used to accomplish classroom-embedded assessment differs. Some examples of this technology include the use of WebCT and associated tools such as e-mail, discussions, online quizzes and surveys, and other online mechanisms to communicate with students, to collect and return graded assignments, and to provide feedback. Another difference is the methods used for student presentations, which in the asynchronous courses consist of narrated PowerPoint presentations, video, and audio files. Students and faculty are taught how to use relevant technology to accomplish the given tasks. For example, in many courses audio and printed instructions on how to narrate a presentation and create and publish content to the Web site are provided for students.

The new online course-evaluation process and instrument currently being developed (discussed above in the response to question number 18) should help address differences in delivery.