

College Planning Initiatives Request Form

College:

The Tseng College – Distance Learning Innovations
Group

Planning Coordinator:

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1. Briefly explain how your plans relate to your college's mission/vision.

The Distance Learning unit offers programs that encompass and extend all of the core College values. For example, our extended service community includes distance learners from across the country and the globe, as well as individuals and institutions in our regional area. The ability to engage outstanding professionals from around the country to form virtual faculties (that are explicitly assembled to deliver a specific program) greatly widens the range of options for program development. The use of technology-mediated instruction (based on andragogy and not technical criteria) provides an area of distinction. Combined with the instructional design, student service and other aspects of the Tseng College approach, the DL unit forms a superset of capacities in service of the University objectives.

The College has the flexibility to rethink existing degree programs as well as to build cross-disciplinary, innovative, even unique programs. Because DL creates "modular" learner centered units as an integral part of our production methodology, the curriculum of courses can often be rearranged, repurposed, and integrated into new program designs. The high rate of change in the working world demands a vastly accelerated pace of program development and modification in order to fully address the current and future needs of midcareer professionals.

The cohort model, which has been used in DL since its inception in 1999 for all programs, provides some particular benefits for distance delivery. First, by standardizing the instructional environment for the entire degree, students can use a flexible but simple user interface for all courses in the program. Second, by creating links to social networking software and other "real world" tools, we can leverage the knowledge that students bring into the program, and increase the immediate relevance of their education to their current jobs.

These examples are illustrative of the many ways in which the distance learning unit has built a superset of core capabilities that reflect and extend the College's core mission.

2. ACADEMIC QUALITY

a) Assessment

Explain how the college intends to assess the outcomes of the planning initiatives: setting benchmarks, assessing against them, using results, etc.

Our approach to assessment is partially a function of each program's organization:

(1) For programs in which we offer a distance delivery version of a department's program that has solid assessment processes in place, ExL supports those partner colleges assessments by adding tools or methods for expanding implementation. A recent example is the KASA program (a competency based assessment required for accreditation in CDS). Working with our academic colleagues in HHD, we assembled a database, devised logic and created forms for tracking the completion of over 200 KSAs. The method has also been adopted by the residential program and thus serves as an example of how the self-support versions of departmental programs can enrich the tools and resources of the State side program.

(2) For departments that have an assessment program in process that is farther back in evolutionary development, we can expand and augment partner college assessments. We can offer to design expanded evaluation instruments and/or to conduct course evaluation meetings with the faculty, department chairs and our course design teams. Our processes are designed to assess course effectiveness according to Performance-Based Assessments and improved for future offerings by ensuring that student competences are aligned with the program objectives.

(3) For Original Degrees Programs that are housing in Tseng, we approach assessment from the initial program design so that the assessment measures fall largely out of the verification processes applied to original program objectives. Currently, we are researching several approaches to allow capturing of audit trail data (i.e. records of student interaction patterns) to assess digitally how students interacted with program modules with the goal of correlating those patterns to student outcomes.

As our programs mature, we will put increasing emphasis on tracking alumni and preserving the network of students and faculty that have been created through the program offerings. CDS has been in operation long enough to begin yielding significant data in that area. Those efforts will be expanded and migrated systematically over to other programs that will have multiple graduated cohorts in the next few years.

An area for increased attention will be the quantitative evaluation of more aspects of our services and functions. For example, we have good data for our technical support functions, but have not yet developed systematic procedures for evaluating the quality of program management services.

2. ACADEMIC QUALITY *(continued)*

b) **The Learning-Centered University**

CSUN faculty and staff have developed pedagogies and learning objectives that take into account the different ways and paces by which students learn, as well as the different media and formats that suit different disciplines and levels of instruction. Recently, we have especially encouraged the replacement of seat time—hours as a measure of learning—with indices and supplementary experiences which allow students to proceed faster, if they can. Record the major ways in which the college has implemented—and will implement—several principles of a learning-centered and/or innovative university. Indicate, too, the extent to which funds have been redeployed to these ends.

All of DL's degrees have been designed with the objective of being learning centered programs. Many factors contribute to the achievement of a LCD, so perhaps a mention of a few methods that are employed that are specific to distance might be informative.

The unit creates programs that allow students to learn in a variety of ways, and to use a self-paced, adaptive approach to learning. The pace and schedule is flexible, but within structured course milestones. Course content is produced in a variety of modes so that students may choose the learning style(s) that works best for them.

Currently, major tools in use among the cohorts include POLARIS (a customized lecture presentation tool developed by DL using standard authoring tools), PDF archives of all slides, audio Podcasts, program-specific Wikis, the Blackboard LMS, project collaboration software (Basecamp), faculty guest speakers (via Elluminate), student-generated content upload software, small group video conferencing and RSS feeds. AV Podcasts, PDA-based course views and HDTV versions are being actively researched.

Learning communities are also actively promoted through the use of team and individual field projects that are then shared systematically with the entire cohort. All programs also involve some instruction in best practices using the tools available optimize a student's distance learning experience. Active student examination of the methods of instruction and group consideration of how all tools can best be used for program support is encouraged and facilitated via forums and other means.

2. **ACADEMIC QUALITY** *(continued)*

c) **Research and Creative Activity**

Colleges and other units should report initiatives that will: (1) “incentivize” research, (2) require matches, in-kind support, or enhancements to facilities, (3) respond to regional needs, (4) revamp the delivery of the curriculum and/or the involvement of students as research/creative apprentices, and (5) or require reforms in RPT that, for instance, clarify the standards for early promotion and specify how alternatives to publication will be appraised. (6) Pay special attention to opportunities, through grants and contracts, to enhance the General Fund support of units and the total compensation of faculty.

There is an ongoing opportunity for faculty to conduct research in distance learning as it applies to their areas of expertise. DL will support the collection of data, consult on the design of research and assist as practical with the analysis of results. Our core staff all have master's or doctorate degrees in areas related to instructional design and performance assessment.

Usability testing and research is ongoing in the unit. Graduate student assistants can participate in applied research evaluations.

In Tseng programs, research and professional involvement in the community has been built in from the start. In the Knowledge Management program, students, faculty and staff have been active members in the Southern California KM Consortium. Our students have been conference presenters, our faculty author research papers and CSUN has hosted two KM events on our campus (and a third in partnership with Pepperdine) over the past two years.

There is a potential for the research function to be expanded significantly in all program areas as function of additional resources and/or external investment.

2. ACADEMIC QUALITY *(continued)*

d) **On-Going Programs**

What changes do you anticipate? In particular, how will change to existing programs support growth and quality improvement? How will the proposed change be supported: with new and/or repurposed resources? Will it entail experiential learning, reduce seat time, reinforce GE, and/or respond to regional needs or accreditation reviews? Will it reflect an entrepreneurial direction to enhance General Fund and total compensation?

See shared values section.

3. STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Describe how your unit will contribute to the CSUN effort to engage, retain, stimulate, and graduate its students. Specifically, concentrate on plans to improve first to second year retention, reach out to K-12 pupils and teachers, make advising more consistent in practice and policy, and improve the support structures for students in courses with high failure rates. Finally, if pertinent, describe plans to mentor and channel undergraduates into post-baccalaureate study.

As mentioned in the previous section, a variety of tools are used to enhance student engagement, knowledge sharing, and communication in the programs. Multiple methods are carefully designed to promote all types of communication:

- *student to student
- *student to faculty
- *student to program staff
- *student to academic support
- *student to technical support
- *student to advisement

In distance, it is even more crucial than in traditional programs that every effort be made to keep students engaged, feeling "connected" and on track.

Graduation rates of all DL programs are exceptional, running in the 85-95% range. Our surveys of students indicate that this is due in part to the one-on-one attention and responsiveness given to students by our faculty and staff.

As we grow, we are developing tools and systematic procedures to leverage the effectiveness of our personnel. For example, comprehensive web sites can answer many basic questions. Follow up conversations with staff or faculty can then explore more complex questions. Data on what technical questions arise most frequently inform our priorities for revision of user materials and orientations. Enhanced alumni programs will not only benefit the program and future students, but contact with alumni during a cohort can be a very reinforcing experience for working students laboring to get through a rigorous master's program.

However, as we add more programs we will need to add more staff in the near future. Our staff is already fully extended with the five credit programs currently up and going.

4. SHARED VALUES

Discuss how proposed initiatives reflect the shared values of the university and your college's core values. What philosophy—what thread—ties together these efforts? Indicate how they respond to assessment reports.

Our philosophy is that learning can be done anywhere and anytime assuming careful planning, excellent design and competent implementation. Potential barriers such as distance, time, disability, and location should not bar a student from accessing quality programs. By offering programs at distance students who have the desire and commitment can change their lives through online education and local field experiences.

DLSG strives to offer the highest quality academic, personal, and business experiences for all students and faculty. We offer exceptional customer service and assistance to both prospective and admitted students, and to the faculty in all our programs. Academic excellence is useless if the interface does not provide access to our intended users. A human factors approach to human systems design is the dominant theme for the breadth of our activities.

As we approach our 9th year anniversary in June 2008, our approach to program development is undergoing a significant change. During the start-up years, there was vast skepticism about the viability of technology-mediated learning. Accordingly, our selection criteria were guided by the need to establish the credibility of the concept as well as our particular products. Thus, programs were engaged that had (1) an outstanding record academically in their residential program, (2) a rigorous standard that graduates had to meet for licensing and/or accreditation and (3) a clear market need that distance learning could address.

These criteria are still important, but in order to scale up effectively and compete in a much the current market with fierce competition, it will be necessary to develop clusters of programs that share some common elements. For example, both Knowledge Management and Engineering Management are systems-oriented disciplines that examine the role of technology and organizational processes. The development of a third program in Human Factors and User Experience Design could provide a cluster of programs that could be co-marketed to organizations. Further, required courses in one program could be redesigned to offer breadth as electives in another. By creating program clusters, we should be able to streamline our marketing, leverage our development and production processes and establish an identity as a center of excellence in specific content domains as well as in instructional delivery.

Another goal is to develop a streamlined model for providing hybrid courses that benefit from our technology and related process but cannot sustain the cost of developing a full distant program. The viability of our face-to-face programs, particularly on campus, is threatened by the increasingly difficult commute to campus. However, hybrid courses must be planned in a way that optimizes their effectiveness by integrating what is done on line with adapted on-site sessions. The design of a good hybrid course can be better than a residential or a distant course; however, typically this standard is not achieved unless a systems approach is applied to the distributed learning model.

A third goal is to build on the very successful CDS program by exploring development of a package of pre-requisite courses. We routinely refer hundred of students to other institutions in order to prepare for the master's degree. By offering a qualifying prerequisite package we might achieve the following: (a) create a viable program that is financially sustaining and realizes additional revenues (b) develop a known pathway for increasing the potential number and quality of students for the graduate program (c) provide a pathway for talented undergraduates from related disciplines (e.g. psychology, sociology, biology) to entry into a professional master's program within one year. This would help address a major State need that continues to grow.

A fourth goal is to explore proactively the partnering with other institutions to offer combined degrees that maximize the attributes that both CSUN and the specific partner bring to the table. Master's and selected doctorates are the main target of exploration in this area.