eCampus Network Group Minutes
October 1, 2009


Absent: Joe Benz, Linda Crowe, Mary Daake, Aaron Dimock, Mark Ellis, Sherri Harms

Guest: Arnold Bateman

Gloria welcomed the group and introduced our guest – Arnold Bateman, Director of Online Worldwide. Gloria’s association with Arnold began about 15 years ago when he was located out at the UNL Panhandle Station in Scottsbluff. After relocating to Lincoln, he became Associate Vice Chancellor of UNL’s Extended Education & Outreach program. His job now, as Director of Online Worldwide, is to get it established. He is here today to help answer your questions.

Arnold gave some background information explaining how Online Worldwide evolved. Six years ago the Distance Education Coordinating Council (DECC) was created with representatives from all the campuses. UNK’s representatives were Gloria and Dr. Wyatt Hoback. Arnold chaired this group. In 2007 Educational Marketing Group (EMG) from Denver was hired to develop a marketing study and situational analysis report of NU’s position in the marketplace and to enhance its distance education growth. In January 2008 EMG reported their findings and it was recommended that Gary Miller be hired to develop a business plan for distance education. This was presented to the NU president and chancellors. As a result, President Milliken has 3 goals: 1) greater access to people in Nebraska, 2) revenue generation and, 3) attract more quality students both nationally and internationally. The Online Worldwide governance structure includes an Executive/Steering Committee, Marketing Committee, and three Communities of Practice Committees (CoP): Instructional Design & Faculty Support, Student Services, and Grants. Gloria is a member of the Executive/Steering and Marketing Committees. Steve McGahan is chairing the CoP-Instructional Design & Faculty Support group.

Discussion:
Please note that questions asked by the audience are in bold with the answers from Arnold Bateman not in bold.
How will Online Worldwide succeed when other institutions that have tried this have failed?
There are several things that should help Online Worldwide succeed. Using a common brand should help drive the website, having a common governance, and increased collaboration between the campuses. Eventually having a common tuition will need to be agreed upon.

As tuition increases, won’t students seek out less expensive institutions?
Research has shown that our peer institutions have higher tuition rates. We will need to look at program costs and what the market will bear.

Will UNK’s tuition be the same someday as UNL?
That will have to be decided upfront. What it will be I don’t know. There will be challenges in sharing courses and tuition, but over a period of years tuition rates could be compressed to be the same.

Each campus has its own uniqueness. Won’t that make it difficult to share courses across the campuses?
Since 2002 the Board of Regents has been looking at ways of reducing duplication of courses.

The tuition differential has been very beneficial in helping cover salaries for summer courses. Won’t changing the tuition differential funds from a revolving account to a state-aided account hamstring us?
The Board of Regents were asked to change the policy in June allowing President Milliken the ability to change tuition variance to a higher in-state tuition. We were under a very short timeline this year. President Milliken has determined that when the distance education tuition variance is returned to the campuses, it will be up to the Chancellors to determine the distribution back to departments. All distance tuition has to be accounted for now. We need to have an entrepreneurial spirit. One really positive thing is we will know how much Distance Education actually generates for the campus. The decision to change over to state-aided accounts from revolving is still open for discussion. We will continue to work on this. Dr. Bicak and the other COAs believe that this should be open for discussion. We are in uncharted water and that is always a cause for concern.

Should the business models be built on the tuition differential?
We need to look at total tuition in terms of our business model. We are being asked to identify the costs, this would include the cost of in-load faculty loads. According to the national study done by Sloan-C, it takes a quarter more time to develop online courses.

Does the 6.7% budget for Online Worldwide stay the same or will it change? Each year the budget will be looked at by steering committee and if there isn’t a need by Online Worldwide, then it will go back to the campuses. There is a need to build up reserves at the campus level.

Back to having a common brand.....doesn’t each campus have its own mission and uniqueness, what is the reason for changing?
The market research that EMG reported was that NU system has a very fragmented image/brand. When interviewing students outside of Nebraska, they discovered students don’t really care where they get their degree.

The three EDAD departments did get together regarding the possible sharing or collaboration of courses. There was not much the other two campuses could offer that we would need; it was more
about what we could provide for them. When we asked about doing the doctoral program here at UNK, we were told we could not because we lack the research capacity within our faculty.

I know Larry Dlugosh is very interested in working with UNK since you offer some courses that they don’t and that would be very beneficial to them. Faculty just need to come together and work through these types of issues. I don’t have an answer for you.

In special education the three campuses have an understanding that each campus would concentrate on their own specific area. At UNK that is Mild/Moderate. Will that change? I can’t tell you for sure. There is opportunity for that group to come back together and discover if there are areas they can share.

Early childhood meets with six colleges and discusses shared resources across state. At what point do you share courses and at what point do you share a degree? There is not enough overlap at any one campus to actually offer a shared degree, but we could share some courses. If we share courses and keep our different degrees, how does that become defined? We are looking at procedures and guidelines to help us work through these things. If you look at the Great Plains model, you see that a student picks a home campus. A home campus could be one of five. In the youth development program, the deans came together with the faculty and looked at what each campus had to offer. They then made an agreement. Let’s say the student picked Kansas State University as their home campus, so UNL may teach 3 or 4 courses and KSU may teach 3 or 4 courses. The student gets the degree from KSU. Now is that a model that works well? We will need to look at it.

It keeps getting said, we feel like we’re doing well here at UNK. Will faculty salaries increase? What are we getting from doing all of this? I would say you are doing very well. Milliken is very excited about the opportunity for growth. With the right financial model in place, there’s opportunity. I can’t say if salaries will go up or not. I know we have the potential to generate more money.

In regard to the procedure for the contact process after the student looks at the Online Worldwide website, how will it be handled especially if degrees look similar? How do they distinguish which campus is offering the program when they look at that site? It strikes me as anonymous and that bothers me. Students still want to visit with a real person. That’s an important part. I’ll comment on part of that. We’re moving forward setting up the call center with an 800 number. There will continue to be a lot of work to do on the website. Sharon Stephan, Assistant Vice-President for Communications and Marketing, UNCA, is overseeing that. We are working on a content management system for the website. When potential students call into the call center and inquire about a program, they will be transferred to a point of contact on the appropriate campus. Perspective students usually want to talk to an advisor or faculty member. The program contacts will also be listed on the website. It is then the responsibility of the campus advisor to convert that lead into an application with timely follow-ups. Three percent of leads are converted into applications, and that is not very high. Arnold then turned over the conversation to Gloria to explain what the eCampus Office is doing to assist the call center. eCampus will be providing Online Worldwide a contact list with email and phone numbers of offices that can be contacted for assistance.

If all three campuses have same program, who gets the contact? I don’t believe we have any that are exactly the same. We’ve discussed that if a student is undecided, then the information needs to go to all three campuses. Then aren’t we back to competing with each other?
Programs that overlap, will they strongly be encouraged to work together? My experience is, being told to do something won’t work well. I don’t have all the say in it. There will be strong encouragement and opportunities to have discussion. But if the faculty choose to or not to, that’s what is going to make the difference.

The issue of three campuses having programs in common. How does the student determine when they see something similar at UNK when UNL is known as the brand. Where does that leave us? How does the student choose now when they look at the website? Well, they may know something about the school and go directly to the website. You’re saying they’ve already made a decision. We have different programs. The memo of understanding helps. If we open this up and the memo of understanding becomes worthless, than we’re competing. That would be contrary to what we want.

To increase capacity if that program is already full, would they all be moved to one campus? Hard to find adjuncts in certain fields. How do we grow?

Duplication of programs/services, we’ve run into that before. The libraries can’t work together because of the cost. When a student at UNO wants a UNK class, it’s not just about signing up for another class. There are forms to fill out. That’s a concern and the faculty are protective of their own programs. When there’s duplication of a program, who will decide that? That’s going to be a touchy issue.

It is sensitive. The Steering & Executive committees are starting to look at this and decide what the process and procedures will be looking at this. Faculty will need to be involved. I can’t tell you what it will look like but we need to address it. We’re not very friendly in terms of students being able to use each campus. Other campuses are much more friendly.

It seems like there is still a lot of work in process to get this underway and yet there seems to be immediate timelines to get this done quickly. Seems like we are still in early stages of putting this together but seems like there are immediate timelines to get this off and running. Shouldn’t most of this be done prior to going ahead?

We have been looking at other successful models across the country…..seeing what works and what doesn’t. Penn State and Umass are the models we are looking at with high quality programs. This will all take some time.

Teacher certification issues are very different on each campus. NCATE used here….if another campus uses something else how do we make this jive together? Endorsement requirements are different on each campus. You can be certified on this campus but not on another. Our standards are different between the campuses. There are just so many issues. Raising tuition will not increase accessibility and I don’t understand how that will help when you know how money is now adays.

UNK is doing great with online enrollment. Why do we need to change things? What is the advantage to UNK to change? President Milliken wants to move this forward – we are not going back!

Does accreditation need to be looked at? Does Online Worldwide need to be accredited? If we are sharing courses to a great extent between campuses and the campus awarding the degree requires that 50% of the courses/coursework come from the home campus, how will that work? The campuses themselves are already accredited. There has to be a desire on the faculty’s part to work these issues...
through. Bring in people from the state department to work through these issues. Early on, we need to bring in the necessary resource people to work on these types of issues.

What would make me select the NU website system? A suggestion for the website would be that information should be linked to the page that explains what the differences are either in tables or grids. Make sure the information is clear and understandable. If I couldn’t find what I was looking for in ten minutes, I would give up and go to another site.

Where do we go from here? What is Arnold’s advice?
The financial model needs to be structured for entrepreneurial enterprise. Get your input back to Arnold & Chris Kabourek. I would encourage you to look at areas where collaboration could begin and let Gloria know. UNK has wonderful faculty training, are there areas that we can do a better job of sharing? How do we become more student friendly?

Could Central Administration come up with a message that the campuses could use to help students understand why we are increasing tuition and what exactly they are getting out of it? That’s something the executive committee can work on. We have to have more lead time to communicate back to the students.

At UNK we seem to have a red-headed stepchild perspective on things. When it comes to UNL we feel we get the short end. The support we’ve gotten from eCampus has been very personalized. Looking at duplication of services, we’re not going to get the same sort of service if our eCampus disappears. Will they still be around until I retire?
The structure on the campus to support faculty is so vital. I believe faculty training whether online or not is a good thing. We need to do more of that.