

Academic Futures/Financial Futures Working Group Online and Distance Education Recommendations

23 August 2019

Committee Members:

Robert H. McDonald, Dean of University Libraries (Lead)

Chris Braider, Chair and Professor, French and Italian, College of Arts & Sciences

Donna Caccamise, Assoc. Dir./Assoc. Research Professor, Institute of Cognitive Science

Robert Erickson, Professor and Interim Chair of Electrical, Computer and Energy Engineering, College of Engineering and Applied Science

Orrie Gartner, Director of Operations, Office of Information Technology

Karen Gebhardt, Director of the Online Economics Programs, Economics, College of Arts & Sciences

Dirk Grunwald, Professor and Director of Applied Computer Science, Computer Science, College of Engineering and Applied Sciences

Lonni Pearce, Senior Instructor/Assoc. Director for First-Year Writing, Program for Writing and Rhetoric, College of Arts & Sciences

Emma Rinzler, Student, Leeds School of Business

Geoffrey Rubinstein, Director of Online Learning, Division of Continuing Education

Jeremy Smith, Professor of Musicology, College of Music

Ex Officio: **Jeffrey Cox**, Professor, English

Emily CoBabe-Ammann, Director of Strategic Projects, RIO

Aisha Jackson, Director of Academic Technology and Design, OIT

Introduction

As part of the Academic Futures process, CU Boulder faculty, staff and students have called for a comprehensive approach to our efforts in teaching with technology, online, hybrid, and distance education, with the goal of creating a teaching continuum from in-class traditional education to completely online courses and experiences, all with the same expectations, accountability and rewards for educators and students. In the spring of 2019, Provost Russ Moore released a [vision for online and distance education](#) that called for the entire campus to embrace the integration of online and distance education into our educational mission, with all of the accountability and academic oversight that our traditional courses receive. Part of that vision is a recognition that every department and unit must ensure that enough of their courses are online to support the success of both residential and distance students.

For the continued success of the University, excellent, innovative and entrepreneurial online, distance, and hybrid programs and courses must be created that provide our students with the best learning experience, while also connecting them to the culture of the Boulder campus, independent of their location or course modality. These programs and courses must be supported by a structure that is not dependent on the type of student (e.g., resident, online, traditional, non-traditional, industry partners) and without extraordinary costs to the student.

Background

The Academic Futures/Financial Futures Working Group was guided by the [vision for online and distance education](#) endorsed by Provost Moore in spring of 2019, along with the recommendations of the [Academic Futures Committee](#), campus engagement, and discussions with key stakeholders. Throughout this process, we were able to reflect on the many successes CU Boulder has with online, hybrid and distance education, and use these examples of excellence as exemplars of what we can become. Here we articulate the guiding principles that informed the Working Group's discussions, its recommendations, and the rationalization as to why these principles and recommendations are appropriate. These recommendations will act as guideposts for the future of online education at the university.

Guiding Principles

The Committee began with a suite of guiding principles to structure our discussions and represent critical guideposts for the future success of this endeavor.



1. The campus must recognize that **structures and processes will have to change** to enable the recommendations to be successful; additional resources will be needed and clear lines of responsibility must be defined.
2. This effort starts with a commitment at all levels to **student-centered education**, from course content and delivery platforms at the faculty and department level to strategic planning, outreach, administration, infrastructure maintenance, and resource allocation at the college and campus level. This shared commitment will result in excellent education across modalities and a unified identity, so all our students feel connected to CU Boulder.
3. This transformational effort requires **operational transparency**, so the structures, policies, and processes for planning, decision-making, and instructional development are clear to everyone and enable, rather than hinder, the development of new online courses/programs.
4. We need to foster and support **an agile culture of innovation and collaboration** that encourages colleges, departments/units, and faculty to explore a wide range of instructional models to meet the needs of current and future students.
5. Leadership must recognize that **significant resources** are required to enable this transformation.
6. The university must approach new endeavors in online education with a **tolerance for failure**, if departments and units are to be willing to take the risks involved in experimentation and innovation.
7. While an important motive for increasing CU's online presence is generation of new revenue, departments and units should have an incentive to **create new courses and programs that fulfill the university's teaching mission even if they do not generate new income**. We must do what's right, not just what's profitable.
8. The campus must affirm that the **faculty have the principal role in originating academic policy and standards** related to the initiation and direction of all courses, curricula, and degree offerings.
9. We must **enable departments/units to determine the "right-sized" fit**, which includes selection of courses or programs, instructional methodology, pedagogy, instructor assignment, and course and program evaluation and assessment with the decisions centered around student-success and department/unit ethos, and to accept failure when it occurs.
10. There must be **adequate support for departments to be innovative, agile, and entrepreneurial**.
11. There must be **predictable and equitable revenue models** that incentivize and recognizes department and faculty efforts, enable coherent and long-term



planning, and provide the freedom for departments to use generated resources as they see fit.

Recommendations

The recommendations that emerged from the committee's discussions during the spring represent a significant transformation for campus, with new structures, roles and responsibilities, and most important, ways of working.

Recommendation #1:

The university should create a new organization to oversee teaching and technology, online and distance learning, with its leadership reporting to the Provost. This unit will be accountable for teaching and technology for all online, hybrid, and distance education, emphasizing **teaching excellence independent of modality** aligned with the campus mission.

There is much to celebrate in the innovative work happening across the CU Boulder campus today, but the lack of a unified vision and comprehensive approach creates an environment of disparate and unequal offerings for students and a lack of overall campus strategic direction. Due to the current structure, departments and units, as well as faculty and students, interface with multiple entities, creating unnecessary confusion for all. By creating a single organization, accountable for online, hybrid and distance education, a comprehensive approach and unified vision can be created and executed where student success, diversity, and outreach goals can be integrated across all levels of the university.

The long-term success will depend on strong partnerships with stakeholders and transparent policies and processes that ensure continuity. The execution of the unified vision and comprehensive approach will require changes to existing administrative and business processes and the new organization will help define the requirements for these areas. To coordinate these essential services successfully, it is imperative to have a single point of responsibility and accountability. The leadership of this organization will be accountable for creating the change in culture required to execute on this vision. The new organization must be adequately staffed and financed so it can perform its responsibilities, ensuring clear, consistent, productive communication with all stakeholders.

Responsibilities of this entity include:

- A. Strategic and long-term planning for the university for online/distance education with an emphasis on providing a comprehensive, student-focused experience. Planning should include all aspects of student life, including orientation, advising, financial aid, etc. and should be done in partnership with the appropriate campus entities.



- B. Support for departments, schools and colleges and faculty in their course and program planning, including providing a “concierge” service that partners with deans, chairs, and faculty to help units determine their “right size” and focus on “what to offer.” This support should include guidelines for and engagement in the departmental roadmaps (see Recommendation #5).
- C. Promotion of a culture of continuous innovation through deliberate attention to the ways in which our work culture must change and by offering incentives that reward high risk and transformational work.
- D. Instructional design and deployment capabilities to support educators and departments/schools to develop and migrate courses and content online, as well as to provide guidance for the development of online degrees and certificates. This should include instructional design and implementation elements currently housed in Continuing Education, the Office of Strategic Initiatives, ASSETT and OIT, etc.
- E. Policy development and administration in coordination with appropriate offices/units/stakeholders, including key operational entities (e.g., Admissions, the Registrar, OIT, the Bursar, the Graduate School, etc.). Streamline and create flexibility in the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, classroom scheduling, and other processes to enable faculty to quickly envision and create courses and programs that best fit student needs.
- F. Serve as the interface for campus with external online program management (OPM) entities and other suppliers.
- G. Relevant budget and resource allocation (time, money, training, technology, infrastructure, personnel) to colleges/departments/units/offices/stakeholders. This should include the ability to develop an Innovation Bank to support higher risk endeavors, as well as development and investment funds to support faculty and units as they make this transition.
- H. Provide, in partnership with the Center for Teaching and Learning, a strong and always evolving-and- growing set of both intra- and inter-university “community of practice” and professional development opportunities, including a robust online community/portal, course design “charrettes” (feedback from peers), departmental online teaching communities, topical workshops, quality certifications and other online professional development, etc.
- I. Recognizing that some of the greatest potential of distance and online education lies in the discovery and engagement of new students and new demographics, significant effort should be invested in developing, implementing and sustaining a comprehensive outreach and marketing program for these efforts.



Recommendation #2:

The new Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), in partnership with the online/distance entity, should serve as the primary conduit for professional development for educators to be fully supported in the pedagogy and technology required for teaching in different modalities. The CTL is charged with being the community-building organization that supports faculty and graduate students in their teaching practice. Its work will include professional development and the nurturing of communities of practice for campus, with expertise in building assessment capacity, inclusive pedagogy, and so forth. The CTL will support the campus to develop and deploy professional development and community building activities.

Recommendation #3:

The campus should undertake a study of financial models for teaching that will support the integration of online/distance education into the overall education portfolio of the campus. Crucial to the success of CU's plan to enrich its offerings in online education is proper investment that provides incentives to participating programs and departments to be innovative, agile, and entrepreneurial. We believe there should be a set of standardized financial models which are fair, transparent and sustainable. These finance models should allow sufficient revenue sharing for departments and units to create innovative courses and programs and must be flexible to reflect and support a wide variety of department effort, levels of engagement, and independence. Once established, the financial models should not be subject to sudden, unilateral change by central administration.

While an important motive for increasing CU's online presence is the generation of additional revenue streams by attracting new students, it is important to develop financial incentives for departments and units to create courses and programs that fulfill the university's teaching mission and support student success without necessarily generating new income. Therefore, we recommend two important components to this study: 1) online or other technological enhancements as a no-added-cost part of the full-time residential experience (especially undergraduate at first) and 2) various degree and certification programs for undergraduate, graduate and non-traditional students.

Additional key characteristics of a successful funding model are listed below.

- A. Create transparent, fair and stable revenue sharing or other enduring monies to appropriately incentivize course and program development and maintenance.
- B. Create transparent and fair pay structures that recognize both the development time and the teaching time necessary for teaching in different modalities.
- C. Enable all interested faculty to do this work, including those at institutes, and consider new models of contracting that are not tied to a 9-month academic year.



- D. Create financial flexibility and facility to take advantage of opportunities, even on short timelines.

Recommendation #4:

Within Faculty Affairs, campus should develop a mechanism for supporting innovative online and distance education, particularly for faculty coming up for promotion.

The campus needs leadership at all levels to support this endeavor. Faculty Affairs should develop policies in conversation with departments, units, schools, and colleges related to load, incentives, annual merit and tenure and promotion. This process should include significant involvement from the new online/distance organization.

Recommendation #5:

All departments or unified schools and colleges, with the support of the campus entity, must develop an online educational roadmap that supports both residential and distance students. A departmental entity, such as the curriculum committee, should be charged with oversight of online and distance courses. The roadmaps must be approved by the appropriate Dean and should undergo periodic review through the ARPAC process.

This recommendation reflects the “concrete first steps” in Academic Futures in that “... schools and colleges, in partnership with their units, must ensure that enough courses are available online to effectively and flexibly enable students to participate, both as residents and remotely.” Combined with the guiding principle that “the faculty have the principal role in originating academic policy and standards ...,” it follows that when creating their roadmap, departments/units and faculty retain independence in determining rightness of fit. This independence would pertain to the selection of course or program, content, modality, instructional methodology, instructor assignments, faculty incentives, whether online courses count as in-load in teaching contracts, accountability and oversight, and the criteria and methods of evaluation and assessment. When developing these roadmaps, the university must approach them with a tolerance for failure to encourage departments and units to experiment with new online and hybrid platforms and modalities. The items outlined below will enable departments and units, with advice, guidance, and support from the new organization (see Recommendation #1), to create a roadmap best suited to balance student success with each unit’s academic discipline and ethos. We agree with the Provost that we must remember that “one size does not fit all.”

The online educational roadmap should include:

- A. An appropriate spectrum of offerings that meet the needs of students, both current and future.



- B. The range of teaching modalities (residential, online, hybrid) best suited to their discipline and their students.
- C. Identification of key courses to move into an online environment that will reduce progression bottlenecks.
- D. Discipline-specific guidelines and expectations for teaching excellence that also align with universal best practices for online teaching.
- E. Support for the transformation of existing courses or programs into different modalities or the creation of new courses or programs in different modalities.
- F. An assessment plan that includes both 1) the quality of the online offerings to ensure that they meet campus guidelines for online best practices (with the support of the campus entity) and 2) discipline-specific content to ensure that learning goals and outcomes are being met.
- G. A timeline for implementation.

Conclusion

While implementing these recommendations will require a significant transformation of CU Boulder's structures and processes, they represent the opportunity to develop new and innovative educational opportunities for all of our students. The engaging learning experiences, collaborative partnerships, and expanded outreach possibilities that will result from this work will position CU Boulder as an institution where our educational mission is significantly enhanced through embracing an expansive understanding of when, where, and how learning happens. The committee invites all CU Boulder faculty and staff to consider the rich potential of what is possible.