



2010-2015 Strategic Plan for Distance Education

DRAFT

Vision Statement for Distance Education

The University of Northern Iowa will be known as a premier provider of high-quality distance education courses and programs in targeted, high-demand areas that match the academic strengths of the university.

Mission

The mission of the Office of Continuing and Distance Education is to expand access to high-quality educational opportunities available from the University of Northern Iowa through the use of a variety of methods and technologies and the provision of exemplary support services.

We accomplish our mission by providing leadership in the planning, promotion, support, and administration of credit courses and programs that fall outside of “traditional” on-campus offerings. These offerings are delivered online, via interactive video, at off-campus locations, or through a blended approach.

Guiding Principles

The following principles guide our work:

- Our efforts will align with and support [UNI's strategic plan](#) and advance our institutional priorities (details in Appendix A).
- The [Office of Continuing and Distance Education](#) will lead efforts at continuous quality improvement in all aspects of distance education.
- New program development must be intentional. Efforts will be guided by the document, [“Criteria for the Development of Programs for Online, Blended, or Off-campus Delivery.”](#)
- Strong support from UNI faculty members, academic departments, and the colleges is essential in expanding efforts.
- The provision of exemplary services to both internal customers and students is at the heart of our efforts to improve. We will collaborate closely with student service providers throughout campus who interact with students at a distance.
- We will collect data on critical indicators to measure how well we are doing. Assessment of courses, programs, and services will be on-going and systematic. Data collected from assessment activities will be analyzed, and the results will be used to improve what we do.
- While the ownership of the academic quality of courses and programs resides with faculty members, their department, and their college, we will collaborate in efforts to improve.
- We will serve as good stewards of the University's resources.

Competitive Strategies

Prospective students are inundated with choices when considering distance education courses and programs. Students can typically conduct a quick online search and locate convenient options that are available at a lower cost and with less rigor than our offerings. In the highly competitive environment of distance education, it is critical that the University develop a clear strategy to differentiate our offerings from those available from competitors.

The overarching competitive strategy encompassed in this strategic plan includes four primary components:

1. UNI must offer **high-quality academic courses and programs** that are perceived by our students to be superior in value than those available from competitors.
2. We must be committed to providing **comprehensive, high-quality student support services** to help distinguish our offerings from the competition.
3. While many distance education providers proclaim the quality of their program and services, our approach will be to **demonstrate quality through an ongoing process of assessment and evaluation.**
4. Efforts at marketing and promotion must be well-designed, innovative, and focused on developing a **brand that is based on the superior quality and value** of our courses, programs, and support services.

Goals and Strategies

The goals and strategies below are designed to support the University's overall goal of increasing enrollments of distance learners and non-traditional students.

Goal 1: Collaborate with academic departments and colleges in targeting the development of new distance education courses and programs.

Strategy 1: Identify programs and courses with strong demand and advocate for their development, including:

- Degree, endorsement, and certificate programs, especially at the graduate level
- Content courses for teachers
- Courses applicable to UNI's Liberal Arts Core
- Upper division undergraduate courses designed for non-traditional students (e.g., Bachelor of Liberal Studies)
- Online courses offered during the summer school session
- Blended degree programs designed for non-traditional students within commuting distance
- "Great Teacher" courses to showcase UNI's faculty with unique expertise and exemplary design elements

Strategy 2: Assess the viability of expanding college credit course work for high school students, including collaborative efforts with the [Research and Development School](#).

Strategy 3: Explore opportunities to offer targeted courses and programs to audiences abroad.

Strategy 4: Collaborate with [Information Technology Services – Educational Technology](#) to increase the percentage of faculty members who incorporate eLearning as part of their instructional plan.

Strategy 5: Encourage and support faculty and departments with efforts to secure external funding to reduce development costs and make continuing and distance education courses and programs more affordable to students.

Strategy 6: Continually review and refine the system of incentives to ensure faculty, departments, and colleges are appropriately rewarded for efforts to increase distance learning activities.

Key Performance Indicators

- Total enrollments in Continuing and Distance Education courses (target = 3% increase per year)
- The number of programs available through distance education
- Percentage of departments offering Continuing and Distance Education courses

Goal 2: Work to ensure that the distance education courses and programs are of a consistently high quality.

Strategy 1: Collaborate with faculty members, department heads, and deans to ensure appropriate systems are in place for the approval, assessment, and oversight of courses and programs.

Strategy 2: Provide individualized, comprehensive instructional design support for faculty members who teach distance education courses.

Strategy 3: Provide high-quality administrative [support services for faculty members](#) and other internal customers.

Strategy 4: Implement the [Quality Matters \(QM\)](#) framework to enhance consistency and quality in online course design.

Strategy 5: Develop a distance education handbook that includes a guide to best practices in distance education instruction and documentation of procedures and policies that frame activities.

Strategy 6: Collaborate with Instructional Technology Services to provide comprehensive, ongoing [professional development opportunities for faculty members](#) who teach and serve distance learners.

Strategy 7: Continually review and evaluate emerging instructional technologies that may enhance teaching and learning.

Key Performance Indicators

- Percent of offerings approved by appropriate department head and dean (target = 100%)
- Percent of new online courses developed using QM framework (target = 100%)
- Number of faculty completing QM professional development activities

- Percent of faculty members indicating they were “satisfied” or highly satisfied” with instructional support services and administrative support services provided by the Office of Continuing and Distance Education
- Percent of students indicating they were “satisfied” or “highly satisfied” with UNI’s eLearning system and/or video delivery system
- Rates of course completion and program completion

Goal 3: Provide exemplary support services to distance education students.

Strategy 1: Align Continuing and Distance Education structures and processes with the [“Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs”](#)

Strategy 2: Fully implement the new Student Information System (SIS).

Strategy 3: Continue to collaborate closely with support areas on campus to enhance services for distance education students.

Strategy 4: Complete the redesign of the [Continuing and Distance Education](#) website to enhance content and functionality.

Strategy 5: Ensure staffing structures and levels are adequate to support the goal of growth.

Strategy 6: Continue to evaluate the use of desktop videoconferencing and other innovative strategies to enhance advising services for distance education students.

Strategy 7: Develop a system for collecting data on non-completers.

Key Performance Indicator

- Percent of respondents indicating “satisfied” or “highly satisfied” with student support services

Goal 4: Develop a comprehensive marketing plan to promote UNI’s distance education offerings.

Strategy 1: Conduct marketing research to identify programs for possible development for delivery through distance education.

Strategy 2: Develop a distinct branding strategy for UNI’s distance education efforts that aligns with the University’s overall branding initiative.

Strategy 3: Streamline the processes involved in tracking and communicating with prospective students through the implementation of the Customer Relations Management (CRM) module, the SIS, and other web tools.

Strategy 4: Continually work to refine and evaluate the various marketing strategies, including Pay-Per-Click (PPC), e-marketing, and direct mail to optimize marketing efforts.

Strategy 5: Capitalize on brand loyalty to UNI by collaborating with [Alumni Association](#) in efforts to promote courses and programs to graduates.

Strategy 6: Work to strengthen marketing ties with Iowa's Community Colleges, Iowa's K-12 systems, and Area Education Agencies (AEAs).

Key Performance Indicators

- Conversion rates for web inquiries
- Cost of acquisition

Goal 5: Provide leadership in managing the financial and reporting aspects of distance education to ensure accountability.

Strategy 1: Consult with departments and colleges in budget development and overall planning for new distance education programs.

Strategy 2: Track revenues and expenses at the course, program, and college level.

Strategy 3: Support and maintain the current set of offerings, while working to expand and diversify with new programming.

Strategy 4: Create efficiencies by incorporating on- and off-campus students in courses and programs whenever possible.

Strategy 5: Ensure a budget is available to provide for the update of new technologies and continually evaluate emerging systems for instructional effectiveness and cost efficiencies.

Strategy 6: Take full advantage of the reporting functions available from the SIS, Office of Institutional Research, and Financial Reporting to enhance reporting and decision-making.

Strategy 7: Explore the viability of differential tuition rates for courses and programs designed for specific audiences.

Strategy 8: Seek out and build upon collaborative partnerships, including course sharing arrangements with [Iowa State University](#) and the [University of Iowa](#).

Key Performance Indicator

- Revenues generated in excess of direct costs

Appendix A – Alignment

Because the development and delivery of distance education courses and programs requires a substantial investment in resources, it is critical that the plan align with Iowa Board of Regents Policies, the [Iowa Board of Regents 2010 – 2016 Strategic Plan](#), the [University’s 2010 – 2015 Strategic Plan](#) and the University’s institutional priorities.

Iowa Board of Regents Policy 6.14 clearly articulates an expectation that the Regent Universities actively seek out unmet needs that fall outside traditional on-campus offerings and develop high-quality educational programming:

- “Distance Education initiatives are included within the missions of the Regent Institutions and shall be undertaken to the extent that resources allow. The Regent Institutions shall seek to anticipate and respond to educational needs, especially those of individuals who may not be able to attend classes on campus.”
- “Programs offered by the Regent Universities shall be of the same high quality regardless of where offered and the methodology or technology used. Similarly, the Universities shall undertake high-quality cooperative and collaborative efforts with both Regent and non-Regent Institutions of higher education where such cooperation will benefit citizens.”
[\[http://www.regents.iowa.gov/Policies/Chapter 6/chapter6.14.htm\]](http://www.regents.iowa.gov/Policies/Chapter 6/chapter6.14.htm)

Similarly, Goal 4 in the 2010 – 2016 Board of Regents Strategic Plan places an emphasis on increasing educational opportunities for non-traditional students, especially those who reside in the state:

- “Iowa’s public universities shall increase distance education opportunities for life-long learning, especially for place-bound and non-traditional students in Iowa to support their educational and professional goals and enhance their quality of life.”

The University of Northern Iowa’s 2010-2015 Strategic Plan identifies several elements that support Regents interest in expanding the availability of distance education courses:

- UNI’s Vision Statement includes the aspiration, in part, that UNI “will be nationally known for innovative education.”
- Goal 2. Objective 2 – Promote innovation in graduate education.
- Goal 6. Objective 2 – Increase the number of non-traditional and distance learners.

*Iowa Board of Regents Policy 6.14 defines distance education as “a formal educational process in which instruction occurs (1) when a student and instructor are not in the same location, or (2) when in-person instruction is provided at off-campus locations. Distance Education efforts at the University of Northern Iowa include online, blended, and off-campus courses and programs.