

eCampus Task Force Report

Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)

[How can eCampus be further developed or utilized to improve and modernize the student experience, increase options for students, and reduce costs?](#)

[What is the eCampus Identity: Alaskan, Northern, STEM](#)

[What programs, certificates, and degrees should UAF be offering online and at what scale?](#)

[How do we sustain online program enrollment growth?](#)

[How do we better integrate with School Districts and better support dual-enrollment?](#)

[How do we maintain our leadership in distance and online learning?](#)

eCampus Task Force Team

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Submitted: April 3rd, 2019

Introduction

Online enrollment growth is a bright spot for UAF thanks to the combination of a cadre of early-adopting faculty, the intentional development of eCampus as an integrated, centralized support. While enrollment numbers have consistently increased for the last seven years, continuing and intensifying that growth during a time of crisis requires more than just “business as usual.”

Given positive national trends, a strong eCampus foundation, and highly competitive tuition rates, opportunities abound for UAF to grow enrollment through development of online programs attractive to students inside and outside the state. Now is the time to capitalize on our opportunities.

How can eCampus be further developed or utilized to improve and modernize the student experience, increase options for students and reduce costs?

What things are we already doing?

- Growing enrollment by developing more online programs and courses. eCampus has coordinated with academic departments to propose **five new online STEM bachelor's degrees and two new online master's degrees** with more online courses and programs to come.
- Facilitating collaboration between Troth Yeddha' campus departments and other UAF campuses to align offerings, minimize redundancy, improve quality and find efficiencies. This includes planning for the delivery of GER courses on a timeline, which could help to avoid internal competition.
- Expanded eCampus services to include eCoaching for students (career, personal finance, transitions and academic pathways).

What are our top 3 recommendations?

- Flatten the tuition revenue model to courses delivered through eCampus for CTC, CRCD and Summer Sessions.
- Deploy enrollment management strategies including: raise course caps and manage sections behind the scenes ensuring students don't encounter "full" courses.
- Expand eCampus' centralized services to encompass synchronous (web conference, audio conference and video conference) and hybrid (synchronous/asynchronous) courses to improve course findability, learner support, design support and overall quality and consistency.

What is important for ongoing and future consideration?

- It will be difficult to garner wide support for the above without addressing the discrepancy the tuition revenue model applied to eCampus and traditional face-to-face offerings of courses associated with programs housed at CRCD, IAC and CTC. This discrepancy needs to be mediated fairly without further hampering those campuses' ability to operate.
- Continue and increase technical support from OIT for both students and faculty needs, which will likely grow as online enrollment increases. Specific support for online teaching tools (e.g. LMS, web conferencing, media capturing and third-party products like Playposit, Voicethread, etc.) will be needed. Helpdesk personnel need to be trained on a variety of products. eCampus can't continue to absorb OIT's capacity for these things.
- Move to modern LMS (Self-hosted Blackboard Learn is a legacy platform). Transition to latest cloud-based version of Blackboard Learn (70%+ of their subscribers) or Canvas or alternative.
- Software systems like Banner can often unduly shape the decisions made by Deans and Department chairs regarding explorations into mixed modality courses.
- Incorporate online teaching experience or training requirement for new academic hires.
- Bandwidth in rural areas will continue to be a factor in delivering high quality, equitable and accessible student experience via online courses and programs.



What is the eCampus Identity: Alaskan, Northern, STEM

What things are we already doing?

- Developing high quality online STEM programs and courses featuring engaging media, active learning, hands-on labs, interactive course designs and eventual Quality Matters certification.
- Supporting niche programs that have high industry demands for best potential for jobs upon graduations (e.g HSEM, EDSE).
- Working with course and program developers to incorporate Alaska-centric (place-based) programs and perspectives in our online offerings. Pristine ecosystems, wildlife, outdoor adventure, native cultures and languages. We can be an online institution with a place-based spirit.

What are our top 3 recommendations?

- **Engage with a global course community partner (Coursera, EdX, Futurelearn) with a core mission course (e.g. climate change) as a wider expression of our identity and brand.**
- **Develop more online offerings featuring our identity and brand. UAF is at the front lines of climate change and is uniquely suited to house innovative online academic and research programs investigating the global change impacts on landforms, ecosystems, wildlife and culture, as well as northern engineering and other areas of institutional expertise.**
- **Identify opportunities for low-residency programs, providing the opportunity for online students to travel to Alaska to complete some portion of their program in residence on the Fairbanks campus or doing fieldwork somewhere in Alaska.**

What is important for ongoing and future consideration?

- Consider offering degree programs uniquely focused on Alaska, the arctic, natural resources and the environment, rural development, tribal management and Alaskan One Health and Wellbeing. Currently, none of these degree programs are offered fully online through UAF eCampus.

- Expand honors program/community to include online students.
- Expand Undergraduate Research & Scholarly Activity (URSA) program, to include online students.
- Integrate online students into aspects of campus life from student governance to student clubs so those students can feel part of the UAF community



What programs, certificates and degrees should UAF be offering online and at what scale?

What things are we already doing?

- Performing market analysis using a leading firm to determine which of our existing programs should be offered online, which programs we do not yet offer that we should and which markets are the best targets for our programs.
- Looking for options to meet workforce development demands. Through the SEP process, eCampus has coordinated with academic departments to propose new online occupational endorsements and certificates, including Geospatial & Remote Sensing Technologies as a fully online option.
- Expanding eCampus offerings of GER courses, which are attractive to local students trying to balance face-to-face scheduling issues.

What are our top 3 recommendations?

- **Gather better student feedback. Conduct student surveys and increase contact points to determine their needs rather than relying solely on institutional data.**
- **Transform current high-enrollment degree programs (especially at the associate's level) into 100% distance degree programs.**
- **Bundle GER courses for AAS and AA students ("passports") tailored to transfer easily to popular higher degree programs at UAF or other institutions.**

What is important for ongoing and future consideration?

- Expand the student advising component of eCampus. Currently, eCampus has one academic advisor. This needs to be expanded as enrollment grows.
- Maintain active and intensive outreach, engagement and advising of potential and current students to deter their enrollment in low-quality for-profit colleges.
- Administrators, staff, and faculty alike must adopt a customer service approach towards students who take eCampus-supported courses. The competition in the higher-education market for enrollment is steep.



How do we sustain online program enrollment growth?

What things are we already doing?

- Building internal relationships with academic departments through faculty development, media services and high profile innovation projects such as CITE.
- Strengthening a dedicated student support team to aid students from admission to enrollment to graduation.
- Prioritizing development of degrees and certificate programs, rather than individual courses. Special attention has been paid to those programs which differentiate UAF from any other university in the world.

What are our top 3 recommendations?

- **Review all OEC and Certificate programs to see what can be delivered fully by distance to encourage completion and provide greater access to students whose place of residence may not provide jobs requiring 4-year degrees.**
- **Provide alternate means of “completion” by encouraging micro-credentialing programs for tech careers and partnering with Cooperative Extension for a larger selection (not just related to CES topics) of non-credit bearing or outside-credit bearing courses that don’t fit into existing programs.**
- **Lower institutional barriers to rapid development such as modifying/adapting workload structures to allow innovative course modalities and improving the**

speed at which new courses and programs are approved. The current ~1 year timeline hinders marketplace agility.

What is important for ongoing and future consideration?

- As online offerings expand, we do not want to lose sight of the particular needs of Alaskan students—specifically students who are remote/rural, and students connected to Alaska Native Studies. Rural student engagement with online programs that are place-based, rural-centric or have indigenous themes is vital.
- Online programs depend on the collaboration of cross-discipline program/departments for supplementary courses. Some departments are reluctant to develop for online delivery. Appropriate encouragement and incentives need to be provided to these programs and departments.
- Increase marketing budget for online programs and courses. UAF is outpaced by peer institutions in this regard.



How do we better integrate with School Districts and better support dual-enrollment?

What things are we already doing?

- Building rich partnerships with School Districts and other School Partners to:
 - complete articulation agreements providing dual-enrollment opportunities for high school students;
 - support good pedagogical practices for online course facilitation;
 - provide school personnel access to view student progress in online courses to mentor and support their own students.
- Completing dual-enrollment SEP and PIT Crew to improve administrative processes for dual-enrollment students and clarify dual-enrollment strategies, policies and efforts.
- Hiring dual-enrollment coordinator (Provost's Office) to provide a single point of contact for dual-enrollment relationships.

What are our top 3 recommendations?

- **Formalize dual-enrollment articulation agreements with school districts, including FNSBSD and the Galena and Yukon Koyukuk School Districts. Galena school district has the largest homeschool program in the state (IDEA), and Yukon Koyukuk has Raven Homeschool, the second largest in the state.**
- **Offer package pricing for online courses to match our competitors (ASU, BYU etc.). UAF does not subsidize tuition for secondary students, and these students are not eligible for federal financial aid. Most students are unable to enroll due to the inability to go through the normal financial award channels.**
- **Build relationships and supporting agreements between UAF Academic Programs and FNSBSD. For example, UAA has agreements that match HS courses with courses at UAA at a minimal cost.**

What is important for ongoing and future consideration?

- Target boarding schools (MEHS, Galena Interior Learning Academy and Nenana boarding school) for specific partnerships for online courses. This would assist specifically with recruitment for AK Native and rural AK students.
- Prepare faculty for unique habits, needs and protection of high school students.



How do we maintain our leadership in distance and online learning?

What things are we already doing?

- Obtaining Quality Matters certifications recognizing our program-based learner support, as well as course and program design quality.
- Increasing collaboration with OIPC to include events co-led by both entities. This is helping to strengthen the link between academic innovation and commercialization/IP opportunities.
- Conduct open faculty development programs and resources; continue to share successful strategies with our colleagues at UAA and UAS; continue work on and expand the reach of Open.uaf.edu and other OER Resources, including iTeachU as an internationally recognized resource for faculty development

- Developing and publishing research on our successes — both collaborative with faculty and directly from our design team.
- Prioritize faculty development rather than technology training as a means to develop excellent online educators valuing and validating the voices and experiences of online learners.

What are our top 3 recommendations?

- **Establish a Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) to provide faculty support and to encourage publishing research related to distance and online learning, including expansion of iTeachU as a signature place-based “active, interactive, reflective” online course pedagogy featuring Alaska and Alaskans, including publishing with University of Alaska Press.**
- **Expand and further improve our media production capabilities.**
- **Increase the number of faculty supported by the CITE program, which offers design support to faculty for projects that may not otherwise find a home at the university or within faculty workloads.**

What is important for ongoing and future consideration?

- Remain aware of the particular needs of Alaska students as we expand — specifically students who are remote/rural, and students connected to Alaska Native Studies.
- Maintain funding for a well supported, professional, collaborative instructional design team. Investment in this unit has an ROI of increased enrollment and increased faculty morale. Development opportunities for the Design Team have a ripple effect across the institution.
- Continue to foster a culture of positivity, promoting openness, kindness, creativity and generosity. This also involves remaining committed to a philosophy of teamwork, professionalism, collegiality and a broadly shared set of skills on a centralized design team that supports all faculty at our institution. Moreover, this involves refusing to accept a mindset that some things "can't be done" and encouraging a mind-set geared towards embracing new technologies, not fearing them. Continue to put classes online that are representative of our core strengths as an institution.

