

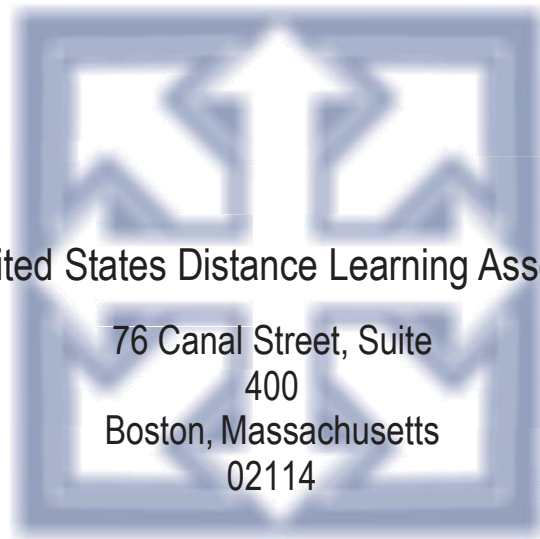
# Quality Standards Review

**University of Wisconsin - Stout**  
1712 South Broadway Street  
Menomonie, Wisconsin



*March 1, 2014*

D I S T A N C E L E A R N I N G  
**Quality Standards**  
C E R T I F I C A T I O N



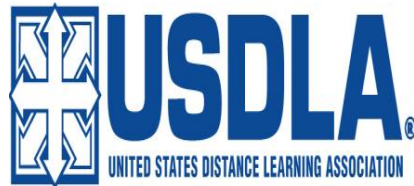
The United States Distance Learning Association

76 Canal Street, Suite  
400  
Boston, Massachusetts  
02114

Tel:  
800.275.5162

The **USDLA Quality Standards** symbol certifies that an institution adheres to recognized standards of quality and performance, is responsive to its constituencies, and is committed to excellence in all aspects of its distance learning.





## **The United States Distance Learning Association Quality Standards Certification**

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## Executive Summary

### The United States Distance Learning Association

#### Quality Standards Certification

#### **University of Wisconsin-Stout**

Quality Standards (QS) Certification is offered by the United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA) to validate and enhance the performance of distance learning providers. The University of Wisconsin-Stout is assessed by its performance in light of the applicable Quality Standards.

The University of Wisconsin-Stout rendered a Self-Study which was thorough, comprehensive, and organized for effective and efficient review. It is apparent that the University understands the complexity of the tasks ahead and has placed at the forefront the design and development of its distance education programs through University of Wisconsin-Stout Online. The University's Self-Study response provided an indicator of its ability to translate plans into sustainable institutional change and improvement.

The four-person Quality Standards Team was favorably impressed by the initiative and dedication exhibited by each staff member at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. The University of Wisconsin-Stout staff approach their work professionally and exhibit a commitment to both the academic programs which they facilitate and to the students enrolled in their distance education programs. The Certification Team found that the University has a team of administrators, faculty, and staff who do not shirk, but rather relish the challenge of implementing distance education programs. The Team notes in the report several areas of excellence that are associated with the University's distance education programs. It especially recognizes the leadership of University of Wisconsin-Stout Online which is meeting the needs and doing its part to produce a quality service.

The Quality Standards Team also identified certain areas with opportunity for improvement. USDLA's Quality Standards are strong in the area of accountability to end users. There are many valuable recommendations made. They are offered...as they should be...in the spirit of program improvement as well as Certification. Of course, the University retains the right to utilize the recommendations that are workable in the next 12 months. We believe they will provide a framework for USDLA Quality Standards renewals in subsequent years.

The expansion of its distance education offerings will present the University with opportunities and challenges, all of which need to be addressed simultaneously to create a quality experience for students, both in and outside of the classroom. The best preparation for any introduction and implementation of distance education programs is detailed planning. The University has been engaged in this kind of planning for a significant time. The recommendations made by the United States Distance Learning Association Quality Standards Team should help the University be ready to proceed with further improvement and expansion.

Finally, the Team noted that the University acknowledges the complexities it will face in implementing quality distance learning and is willing to make the requisite adjustments to move forward with any recommendations made by the United States Distance Learning Quality Standards Team. The University is determined to provide high quality distance education

programs to its students and, as it has consistently done in the past, will place the quality of the student experience at the center of its decision making going forward.

### **Endorsement**

The Quality Standards Team is unanimous in awarding the University of Wisconsin-Stout the United States Distance Learning Association's Quality Standards Certification.

### **Areas of Recommendation**

#### **Standards**

The "Standards of Practice" articulate expectations for USDLA-Certified distance learning programs. The standards are organized in five functional areas. Within those five areas, there are a total of 117 standards.

The five "Standards of Practice" areas are:

1. Provider Prerequisites
2. Administration, Leadership, and Management
3. Learner Affairs
4. Teaching and Learning
5. Infrastructure

The University of Wisconsin-Stout was evaluated on the 117 USDLA Quality Standards. In the review, the University's distance education programs received the following ratings. On fifty-eight (58) Quality Standard rubrics of "Target", "Satisfactory" and "Deficient", the Certification Team found 34 standards on "Target" and 23 were "Satisfactory" and 1 was "Deficient." On 59 "Yes" and "No" rubrics, the Certification Team found that there were 56 standards that met expectations with a "Yes" response, 2 standards that did not meet the criteria and received a "No" response, and one "Not Applicable." It is important to note that a designation of "Target" is the highest Quality Standard rating and exemplifies that the University is meeting the requirements and expectations for quality distance education programs.

As the University continues its development and expansion plans for its distance education programs, it is important to address the areas of recommendation that will require further attention and development; and use them as a foundation to create quality distance education opportunities for students. The final report reflects decisions reached by the entire team. A brief summary of the United States Distance Learning Association Quality Standards recommendations follows.

### **Standard 1: Provider Prerequisites**

#### **Areas of Recommendation**

1. In tandem with its strategic plan, develop a University-wide *Distance Education Policy Statement* regarding the role and mission of distance education. The *Distance Education Policy Statement* should articulate the distance education mission of the University and how the addition of distance education courses and programs complements the mission statement. In addition, the *Distance Education Policy Statement* should be specific in its statement of objectives enabling prospective distance education students to be well informed about the purpose of the education they will receive. The *Distance Education*

- Policy Statement* should be consistent with the University's founding purpose and philosophy.
2. In future reviews, the Chancellor should ensure that the *Distance Education Policy* continues to define the core strategy of distance education programs in the form of explicit statements of vision and strategic direction.
  3. Any review of the University mission by the University administration, faculty, students, and alumni should include a reflection of the impact that distance education programs are having on the University and its mission.
  4. Further expansion of distance education programs is likely to bring significant changes to the current University culture. The Visiting Committee suggests that continued attention should be given to encouraging open communications that accepts criticisms and suggestions which will be the key to achieving and sustaining quality distance education programs.

## **Standard 2: Administration, Leadership, and Management**

### **Areas of Recommendation**

1. The University will need to develop and implement the next stage of in-depth and comprehensive planning to ensure that the highest quality of academic standards are met when expanding and implementing its distance education courses and programs.
2. The Visiting Team believes the current organizational model will not work as distance education programs expand at the University. Distance education authority should be organized and led by a single entity. The adjectives of “disconnect” and “silos” were repeatedly used. The Team observed many competing interests and “turf” issues among the Colleges, departments, IT, and faculty. Although these issues are not uncommon in Higher Education, Stout will benefit from a more cohesive and leader-based approach. The team found that Colleges and departments vary dramatically in their faculty training, syllabi, course evaluations, marketing, and in many aspects of developing and delivering their online programs. The quality of cross-communication and collaboration with Stout Online also varies by College and department. Stout Online is ready to embrace, unite, and lead the University’s online programs. It is critical that there is an organizational structure that supports, and is responsible for, the success and failure of the University’s online programs. There should not be multiple entities vying for control and support. Students and faculty interviewed were not clear who to contact regarding varying online questions.

Recommendations to help implement the aforementioned might include the following:

- a. Associate and Assistant Chancellors, Provost, deans, directors, chairs, faculty, department staff, and campus leaders need to be the recipients of, and fully engaged in, the delivery of “messages” that tie online education to the fundamental institutional mission and priorities. Distance education is mainstream; it is a critical component of UW-Stout’s strategic growth plan and needs to be consistently presented in that way to the University’s various constituencies.

- b. UW-Stout Online, or similar entity, should be empowered by the administration to lead the University's online programs and to collaborate with the deans, directors, and chairs of the Colleges as well as administrators, department staff, and faculty.
    - c. UW-Stout Online staff members need to be involved in all university-wide meetings, committees, and councils including short- and long-term planning and assessment. Stout Online needs to conduct forums that will better communicate its programs, projects, and activities to the departments and Colleges. A few program directors stated they were not sure what responsibilities Stout Online performed, thus leaving an administrative vacuum that will be filled in an unsystematic or fragmentary manner.
  3. A review of potential resources-both financial and personnel- should be completed to ensure that UW-Stout can sustain its margin of excellence in light of increased student enrollment which will inevitably add to the workload of many operating units.
  4. Faculty members are critical to the success of the expansion of the University's distance education courses and programs. It is suggested:
    - a. The University considers initiating a required *Faculty Online Training Certificate* with "tiers of expertise" for faculty who teach online.
    - b. Establish a consistent faculty support compensation model for faculty creating online courses (the compensation could include release time, stipend, graduate assistant, equipment, conference travel, etc.).
    - c. Academic administrators and supervisors, for both faculty and staff (where appropriate), who are required to support and evaluate distance education staff, faculty, and support services should document having taught one online course and/or participating in delivering online services, to better understand the online process and demands.
    - d. Encourage faculty to use more synchronous tools in their classes. One suggestion is to require a minimum of two- or -three synchronous classes a semester including one scheduled during the first two weeks of the semester. These synchronous classes should be recorded for those who were unable to attend the synchronous class.
    - e. Increase the training for, and the use of, engagement tools in all distance education courses.
    - f. Distance education professional growth and development should be systemized and required for all distance faculty and adjuncts throughout UW-Stout.
  5. The University needs to better distinctly brand its "Online Programs." Currently, most Colleges and departments market their own programs and, often, continue to target their historic prospective student base. However, marketing courses to online adults is very different than marketing and communicating with on-ground students. In an effort to maximize the University's online presence, University Marketing should be responsible

- for packaging the University's online products and be the catalyst and conduit for marketing.
6. The University should develop an integrated model for describing on-ground and online courses and programs and students. Describing students as "customized instruction" (CI) students is not productive. They are UW-Stout students. The designation of a "CI" student implies that one is getting a different and/or inferior education. Doing so muddles marketing and branding.
  7. The assignment of online courses to part- and full-time faculty should be given the same priority status as on-ground courses. Seemingly, some departments and Colleges place the assignment of online courses secondary to their on-ground classes. Several part-time online faculty note that they received course assignments with only a 7-day notice. Preparing to teach an online class is much more time consuming and intensive than on-ground courses. This impacts the quality of online courses because of a lack of preparation time.
  8. Both administrators and staff suggest that a huge challenge is the variability in tuition pricing between online and on-ground classes. This effects many areas such as registration, sections of classes offered, support services, student enrollment, lost revenue, and so forth. The Team realizes that this is a formidable challenge. One approach is to enlist the key stakeholders in developing strategies to minimize the negative impact on students, services, and enrollment.
  9. Some key personnel continue to advocate that online students should be required to physically visit campus one day a semester/ year in order to become immersed in the UW-Stout culture. This suggestion indicates a misconception of who Stout online students are and will be. This misunderstanding of students who study at a distance could be, consciously or unconsciously, negatively impacting enrollment and service support.
  10. Make data about online classes more granular so variables can be more readily analyzed. Review internal data and external research concerning online learning that will help inform an expansion of quality online learning. The analysis and distribution of formative and summative quantitative and qualitative data of distance education student learning is critical to effective growth.
  11. Ensure that academic continuity (disaster recovery) plans are available to faculty, staff, and students. None of the faculty, staff, or students interviewed knew how they would continue their work responsibilities if there was a disaster. We did hear a few inconsistent, ad hoc responses to unforeseen circumstances.

### **Standard 3: Learner Affairs**

#### **Areas of Recommendation**

1. Continue to identify technology tools that will support students in having one-on-one discussions with their professors. Students want to interact with professors more. The



- ability to interact in this manner, and the underlying technical competencies, differ greatly among faculty.
2. A formal plan should be developed that encourages online student involvement for student leadership, campus clubs, organizations, etc. In addition, identify, evaluate, support, and ensure that co-curricular organizations and events, if not incorporated with those on-ground, are of the quality offered to on-ground students. These organizations and events create a collegial culture that becomes even more important as the university advances further with online degrees.
  3. Research a “peer mentor” program for online students.
  4. Explore additional forums and methods by which concerns, issues, and grievances arising from distance education programs may be resolved. As the distance education student body grows, the nature of issues and grievances may require a dedicated and non-biased forum for the consideration and resolution of concerns and appeals at a distance.
  5. Develop an orientation learning module for D2L as a prerequisite for all new and readmitted students. It should also include links to key academic support centers and personnel. One suggestion is to better prepare online students for their first course. It is important for online students to have a positive online experience which is fostered by their focusing on course content and not on the technology. Many students (especially graduate students) mentioned that they were in a “sink or swim” situation and might not have continued if the professor had not held their hand. One graduate student stated the following: “Thank goodness I received my undergraduate degree online at Stout. . . .as a graduate student I would not have had any idea how to begin my courses if I did not have that previous online background. UW-Stout needs to do a better job so graduate students are comfortable in an online environment before they take a course.”
  6. Investigate more fully the implications of providing accelerated courses. Having some courses not tied to the UW-Stout’s on-campus academic calendar would be a new paradigm for the University, but there is ample precedent for it in online learning and students expressed a strong interest in this flexibility.
  7. Explore the possibility of offering the first online “honors program” for the University of Wisconsin system.
  8. Continue to ensure that all University catalogs, policies, procedures, and forms are online, kept current, and formatted. University forms and records should be designed where students may complete their information online and sign electronically.
  9. There should be further evaluation and analysis of how best to accommodate students with disabilities including ADA and 504 compliance.
  10. There needs to be a more robust system to track online students who drop out of UW-Stout. It is important to keep track of returning students as well as to regularly follow up, and encourage enrollment, with those students who only planned to withdraw for a semester.

11. The library was highly regarded by students once they realized its importance and availability. Faculty should be proactive in engaging online students with library resources at the beginning of a course and library information and resources should be required to be included in all D2L course templates. Many students said they were halfway through their program before they realized what a valuable resource the library was. Earlier engagement of library staff with online students is important.
12. Related to Library support:
  - a. Enumerate goals for library usage in online classes;
  - b. Add items to course evaluations to assess student awareness and use of Library;
  - c. Publicize library along with library help desk hours for distance students;
  - d. Share Library live tracking data to determine the specific use by UW-Stout online students; and
  - e. Use tutorials and other special features of the library.
13. IT support primarily focuses on equipment that is distributed to traditional on-ground students. Many faculty and students struggle with a lack of IT knowledge and support for anything other than that distributed by the University. It is imperative that IT support staff be further trained and gain expertise to support a wider range of computers, tablets, mobile devices, and technology tools used by online students and faculty.
14. Identify all processes that are not user-friendly or accessible to distance students. For example, some segments of non-degree online students still can only apply by filling in a PDF application and then either faxing or mailing it.
15. The University should continue to support the use of technology that allows remote academic and career counseling to distance learning students to ensure an immersive, consistent, and quality learning environment.
16. There is a need to increase the mobile profile by increasing training and opportunities for faculty and staff to engage with and use enabling technologies. UW-Stout should further research and incorporate new technologies including mobile learning so students can better interact and further connect at a distance.

#### **Standard 4: Teaching and Learning**

##### **Areas of Recommendation**

1. The entire UW-Stout community needs to understand that distance learning is vital to the future relevance of the University and to its constituencies. This can be buttressed by looking at higher education, including statistical trends, on a national basis. Many UW-Stout faculty believe that too many of their colleagues are “oblivious” to the educational currents beyond their immediate classroom walls.
2. Staff and faculty want a better understanding of the Chancellor’s priorities for distance learning. Faculty and staff would be empowered to advance institutional goals if they had a clearer sense of the Chancellor’s vision.

3. The University's evaluative protocols will need to be used extensively to monitor the progress of distance education. The goal to broadly expand distance education will impact the current policies, procedures, IT, operations, and culture. In light of this, the Visiting Committee recommends that there be university-wide distance education planning meetings convened by the Office of the Chancellor to address the following:
  - a. As a team, review of the University's strategic plans and goals for distance education including the goals and benchmarks for each College, department and office. This will help all stakeholders better understand the individual College and department connections needed to achieve the University's distance education goals.
  - b. Encourage more broad-based participation in the program evaluation of its distance education programs with individuals at all levels of the University – administration, faculty, and non-academic departments – participating.
  - c. Investigate more cross-departmental/College planning assessment of online programs among areas that are vital to the University's mission.
  - d. An annual university-wide collection of all student course evaluations in all Colleges and distinguishing between distance and on-ground respondents. Data should be shared with all campus leaders and assistance should be provided in interpreting data as appropriate.
  - e. Continue to seek open dialogue and feedback from all stakeholders (faculty, students, program directors, chairs, deans, administrators, etc.) in order to (1) update Distance Education goals, highlight areas of achievement, and benchmark completion, and (2) identify concerns and problems in establishing a plan of action.
  - f. Further evaluate data related to online courses.
  - g. Identify partnerships, both internal and external, that can be responsive to the University's evolving needs in its distance education programs.
  - h. Continue to ensure that all university-wide planning and evaluation initiatives include Stout Online and are sufficiently broad-based to include both those guiding and those implementing the initiative.
4. Stout Online should further research and work with the Colleges, departments, and offices to:
  - a. Evaluate any areas needing improvement for those students who will geographically remain at a distance while pursuing their degree.
  - b. Develop an annual online faculty survey which asks for faculty perspectives on the services and resources provided to online faculty. This systematic outreach should, ideally, be anonymous, and could include professional development suggestions and solicit ideas for improvement.

- c. Identify and standardize important online information and resources that must be included in all online syllabi and within D2L courses.
- d. Investigate why some classes lack interaction and engagement.
- e. Identify small rewards/compensation for distance education faculty and staff that go “above and beyond” in developing new courses.
- f. Pursue the use of broader (authentic) assessment strategies in lieu of tests and exams in an online environment.
- g. Review distance education programs to assess their compatibility university-wide in terms of online faculty recruitment, deployment, and development.
- h. Apply the same principles and practices that are used to identify and support field placements (practica and student teaching assignments) for on-ground and apply them to distance learning students.
- i. Implement synchronous technologies for certain academic purposes such as enabling student group collaboration and offering archived course sessions.
- j. Explore the feasibility of those who manage, oversee, and evaluate distance learning personnel or programs to periodically teach online.
- k. Host the infrastructure for building and supporting new courses and refurbishing current courses.
- l. Identify possible incentives beyond salary increases for faculty to develop online courses. Awarding stipends, designing better lead times, funding conference travel, or offering expert assistance are all possibilities.
- m. Utilize the resources of national associations.
- n. Target the opportunity to extend online courses to military bases and home-school learners.
- o. Establish institution-wide policies for distance education faculty in areas such as the response times to students and the maintenance of on-line (versus on-ground) office hours.
- p. Increase the number of faculty certified as Quality Matters reviewers and trainers.
- q. Serve as a catalyst for online faculty sharing and meeting with other online faculty members on a variety of subjects (e.g., how they have incorporated interactivity into their online classes). Professional development for those teaching online should include an annual one or two day retreat for

distance education faculty to share their experiences and to model quality distance learning courses. Many faculty- and especially adjuncts- expressed an interest in having an annual face-to-face.

- r. Adopt a software paradigm that will support students having one-on-one discussions with the faculty. Tools such as Skype, Go-to-Meeting, FaceTime, Polycom RealPresence, or WebEx would allow teachers to provide online office hours. Faculty want to use a range of tools to further engage their students.
  - s. Engage and include part-time faculty in such activities as Brown Bags and any training sessions. These could be offered live as well as archived and made accessible for their viewing. Faculty felt they needed more interaction with their colleagues and more current information.
5. If UW-Stout seeks to foster continuous improvement in the “product” (courses) which it offers to customers (“students”), that process is thwarted by not having a common language to describe the product. There is not a consistent evaluative instrument for students to describe their online class experience. It is important to include criteria that reflects the quality of online teaching in all online faculty and staff performance reviews. Common evaluation instrument questions that include online teaching criteria should be used to assess online instruction across the institution. These questions should be developed and standardized across the University.
6. The University needs to develop and standardize key questions to include in all online faculty and staff performance reviews regarding the delivery of online courses. It is important to implement common end-of-course faculty evaluation questions. Responses to those questions should be accessible in coordinating the University’s distance learning presence. There is tremendous disparity in comments regarding faculty evaluations. The School of Education should be commended on its faculty evaluations. One instructor stated:
- “In other departments and Colleges, end-of-course evaluations are little more than smile sheets and they don’t go anywhere. Here, the program manager calls you up and talks about individual items ... and whether a given response is meaningful or not.” *[instructor]*

However, many online faculty stated that they are not reviewed, nor does their supervisor access their course. The following instructor comments reflect the general feedback the Committee received.

- “Faculty evaluations come to the department chairs and they can just blow them off. Very few [adjuncts] have really been evaluated. They work for Doug but the department chair is the guy’s evaluator.” *[instructor]*
- “I have worked part-time at Stout for many years and my supervisor has never spoken with me regarding an evaluation. I do receive a “good job” comment every once in a while.” *[instructor]*

7. Implement video technologies for various academic purposes including providing synchronous and archived professional development to faculty (especially adjunct) and staff.
8. Improve the use of the online learning platform by offering faculty more structured D2L training. This would include identifying means by which faculty could use the interactivity tools within D2L in their online classes. Extend the faculty training to include student and staff services/departments that work within the online D2L course framework.
9. Faculty should evaluate course learning outcomes that could better serve students by providing more realistic labs, field interaction, hands-on experiences, and/or authentic assessment.
10. Extended coverage in support offices on evenings and weekends to support online students.
11. The University should discuss and evaluate some of the more traditional views still embraced by departments and Colleges. Student and faculty comments reflect the frustration that distance learning is still not on an equal footing with on-ground by many University staff. Comments included:
  - “Why can’t campus students take online classes without a hassle?” [*student*]
  - “I get grief and asked why do online students wait for the last minute to register?” [*student*]
  - “There is no smooth transition from on-ground to on-line classes.” [*student*]
  - “Administration has never taught online so how can they appreciate the amount of time it takes?” [*instructor*]
  - “Some professors just move classroom classes online and do not get involved in the online environment or technology.” [*student*]
  - “I have no idea where to get tutoring and support and my instructor does not know.” [*student*]
  - “Many services are still geared to traditional support” [*student*]
12. We applaud the recent hiring of an instructional designer to work specifically on online courses. Consider expanding the number of instructional designers and/or develop an instructional design team model to address the backlog of 40 courses. A model commonly used for developing new online courses is either a team approach (instructional designer, creative staff, faculty member) or course development training for the faculty member with release-time or monetary compensation for building the course. UW-Stout is making good initial steps in this area. A few instructor comments:
  - “For new courses, faculty are asked to do so much with very little time. Putting a class online is a huge burden to the faculty. No technology staff to help them. Faculty need help in this area.” [*instructor*]
  - “Stout doesn’t have the money to pay for technical help when building a course – so they [the faculty] take it on the chin and are not always successful.” [*instructor*]

13. Before developing and designing a new on-ground program, Colleges should work with the appropriate University departments to research whether the new program would attract more students if it was initially offered online. These departments should include PARQ, University Marketing, Stout Online, etc.
14. E-textbooks are a good idea for some students, but they are not for all students. Consider providing an option. One size does not always fit all. One student's comment captures other students' sentiments.
  - "I have a job where I sit at a computer screen for 8 hours a day. My courses this term have only e-texts. I cannot then sit and look at a computer screen for another 4 hours each night when I get home. My eyes can't take it."  
*[present student]*"
15. Educate and train staff and faculty on "Fraud Rings" and the warning signs. The University has legal exposure if it is not pro-active in this area.
16. Continue the emphasis on Web enhancing on-ground courses.
17. It is important to develop a few "model courses" for faculty that exemplify how to use D2L tools.
18. Evaluate the funding for the library as the prices for the subscriptions for mega search engines and other digital resources increase annually. It is important to cover costs of their cutting edge videos and electronic property.
19. New technology is a "cost-of-doing-business expense" for online learning. Resources need to be invested in faculty professional development if programs are to remain viable and flourish long term. Lecture capture and two-way video are not "cutting edge", anymore; they are every day tools in online learning. The following student and faculty comments capture the essence of the issue.
  - "One writing teacher would post videos to help us out. That was good – it helped visual and auditory learners." *[recent graduate]*
  - "Would like the content delivery to be more interactive." *[student]*
  - "We were cutting edge at one time, but now we have not kept up. We need video, we need good lecture capture tools." *[instructor]*
  - "I think we've settled in and not moved forward. We need to continue to bring things forward. For instance, two-way video. We need to be able to meet with students through a variety of tools. We need to be able to see their video as well. It is a hot area and we should be doing more"  
*[instructor]*

## **Standard 5: Infrastructure**

### **Areas of Recommendation**

1. The creation of quality online courses and programs requires a significant amount of time, resources, training, and instructional design support. Therefore, to support the University's

goal of increasing the number of distance education courses and programs, there must be a commensurate increase in the resources devoted to online education. This includes further supporting the faculty creating courses, Stout Online's operations and staffing, and the Colleges and departments responsible for the development and delivery of the online curriculum. In support of the aforementioned, the Certification Team suggests the following:

- a. Develop a program enrollment growth chart that aligns with an incremental increase of staff and faculty.
  - b. Market and garner stakeholder and community support for the Chancellor's vision of the University of Wisconsin-Stout becoming "*THE*" distinguished branch of the University system for quality and exemplary distance education programs. This goal could be advanced by developing an information module to better introduce University of Wisconsin-Stout non-distance education staff and faculty to the University's distance education mission, policies, and procedures. Ideally, this would include some treatment of online pedagogy to help on-ground faculty understand the distinctive features of online learning and how it can be highly successful.
2. The University should develop and fund a viable IT plan that recognizes both short- and long-term demands of the online program. The plan should recognize the importance of system, platform, and network capacities; accessibility; security and privacy; storage; and reliability specifications.
3. The Library maintains excellent communication with many faculty and students concerning programmatic, teaching, and scholarly needs. Suggestions for improvement include:
- a. The library should collect and further disaggregate data on distance learning in the areas of the effectiveness of service, research assistance, and adequacy of collections and resources for faculty, staff, and students. This data should be used to influence library decision making and to shape future planning.
  - b. Consider instituting Library support with "live chats" 7 days a week.
  - c. Further identify budget allocations dedicated to the Library which occur in conjunction with growth in program curricula.
4. For the University to identify, prepare, engage, retain, and to graduate students who have selected to fulfill their program of study via distance education, the Visiting Committee recommends the following:
- a. Further utilize social media tools to increase marketing and recruitment.
  - b. Continue creating a virtual student environment/center where online students may meet to establish a community of learners (use of wikis, blogs, posting of announcements, etc.). As with on-ground student centers, rules denoting acceptable behaviors must be established, posted, and procedures listed to report inappropriate use.
  - c. Launch an online 'student suggestion box' which allows students to submit recommendations at any time.



- d. Form a committee representative of all school organizations, clubs and athletics and plan how to further identify and then incorporate University activities for distance students including a student lounge, broadcasting athletic events, etc.
- e. Consider a distance education alumni tracking system and establish an online alumni association.

5. International distance education students need to receive the same quality of services and support. Therefore, to prepare for further global distance education enrollments, the Visiting Team recommends the following:

- a. Review current operational policies and procedures to ensure that distance learning students receive comparable services as on-ground and in-state online students. (i.e., live advising, help desk services, etc.) or areas of conflict such as immunization policies, etc.
- b. Update student support services to address international students' needs such as translations, TEFL/TESL/TESOL, proctoring, faculty advising, etc.
- c. Establish an international online student community.

6. The University should continue to upgrade its technical infrastructure so it can adequately support the expansion of distance education programs and student enrollment. There were several areas where manual processes, while providing excellent customer service, would impede the ability to scale. Processes and technology could be employed without loss of the human touch.

7. Evaluate facilities and the capacity to accommodate an expansion of distance education and blended distance programs which will potentially increase enrollment (i.e., Stout Online office space, etc.)

8. Mobilization (the use of mobile devices and mobile content of apps and mlearning) is rapidly transforming University campuses. Faculty and students are transforming their mobile devices from mere social tools into effective educational and social tools. Smart phones and tablet devices are quickly becoming students' first choice for accessing the Internet for educational information, interacting with campus services and staff, as well as serving as their key communications tool. These mobile devices enable students to access information anywhere, at any time: learning is in one's hand. To further take advantage of this educational technology opportunity of mobilization for enhancing teaching and learning, the following recommendations are offered for consideration:

- a. Do further research to address the impact that mobile devices and associated digital mobile content (apps, social media, eBooks, etc.) are having on teaching, learning, IT operations, student engagement, and interactions with campus services. Survey students and faculty regarding their current use of mobile devices for accessing educational information and campus services.
- b. Establish a mobilization committee to include departments and Colleges and related services in creating a strategic plan for campus implementation and management (IT, bandwidth, security, academic programs access, etc.) of mobile

devices.

- c. Consider additional purchases of mobile devices as teaching, research, and workforce tools for faculty and staff to explore the educational benefits of mobile learning anywhere; and at any time. There is a legitimate concern with “wasting” money on new technologies. One way to insure against that is to put promising technologies in the hands of savvy users to let them explore and learn.
- d. Due to continuous changes in mobile technology and the various levels of use of mobile devices by faculty and staff, a regular series of professional development activities should be outlined. This could consist of updates on the impact of mobilization, targeted hands-on training, assessment, and best practices for teaching and learning.
- e. Establish criteria for evaluating the cost and effectiveness of mobile technology. (Examples: Abilene Christian University, (ACU) has developed several evaluation instruments for mobilization. The Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) created mobilization rubrics for evaluating mobile apps and devices for teaching, learning, and workforce development ([www.tbmobile.org](http://www.tbmobile.org)).

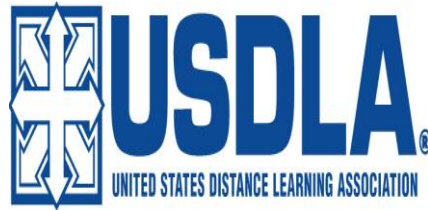
9. Develop a regular email blast for specific audiences including faculty, staff, and students that in a light, conversational tone highlights a common topic, technology update, or a particular, “Did you know?”

### **Conclusion**

The foregoing recommendations should not overshadow the reality that the University of Wisconsin-Stout and Stout Online have exemplary academic programs. However, implicit in the Team’s role is the responsibility to define areas of potential improvement. The areas mentioned above, while important, should not detract from a superior job being performed by a dedicated team of professionals.

Finally, the Quality Standards Team was impressed by the initiative and commitment exhibited by each staff member of the University and the Stout Online team. As fellow distance-learning practitioners, we take great pride in the accomplishments of the University and its faculty and staff who serve students at a distance. We believe the University will reflect credit on the United States Distance Learning Association and on its Quality Standards Certification program. Therefore, we are pleased to recommend that the University of Wisconsin-Stout be awarded the United States Distance Learning Quality Standards Certification.

The aforementioned was an *Executive Summary* of the University of Wisconsin-Stout USDLA Quality Standards Certification Report which is presented in pages 18-66.



## United States Distance Education Association Quality Standards Certification

### Overview and Background

Chartered in 1987, the United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA) is the nation's oldest and largest professional association focused on all forms of distance education. The non-profit Association's mission is to support the development and application of distance and technology-based learning. A consistent means of doing so has been to emphasize best practices, high standards, and professionalism. Thus, the *Quality Standards Certification* (Quality Standards) program is a practical extension of the USDLA mission which benefits both those who provide distance education and those millions who have chosen to learn in this manner.

The USDLA Quality Standards Certification indicates that an institution adheres to recognized standards of quality and performance, is responsive to its constituencies, and is committed to excellence in all aspects of its distance education programs.

### University of Wisconsin-Stout

The University of Wisconsin-Stout is accredited by The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges & Schools (NCA). The University of Wisconsin-Stout is a comprehensive, career-focused polytechnic university where students, faculty, and staff use applied learning, scientific theory and research to solve real-world problems, grow the state economy, and serve society.

The University of Wisconsin-Stout is part of the University of Wisconsin System and is governed by a Board of Regents. Additionally, the Chancellor's Advisory Council (CAC) is the core of the campus leadership system. CAC meets bi-weekly, and involves 19 university leaders from administration, faculty, support services, Stout Student Association, and the Stout Foundation. The Customized Instruction Advisory Committee provides direction to UW-Stout Online in carrying out the day-to-day operations supporting online students, faculty, and programs.

The University is governed by policies developed at several levels. They include federal law, Wisconsin Statutes and Administrative Code, Board of Regents' and UW System Administration policies, and policies developed at UW-Stout. Led by the Chancellor, UW-Stout is responsible to meet the goals set by the Board of Regents; run the day-to-day academic, operational and planning functions; interface with the community and other stakeholders; and manage the support services and administrative staff.

The UW-Stout Online mission supports the delivery of quality online programming. The online and other non-traditional programs supported by Stout Online are tailored to the needs of career-focused individuals. UW-Stout offers 17 Certificates and 10 Certifications. UW-Stout also offers General Education Courses, Online Professional Development for Educators, Spanish for the Workplace, and the Stout Vocational Rehabilitation Institute. In addition, it offers the following online degrees:

- B.S. Career, Technical Education and Training
- B.S. Engineering Technology
- B.S. Golf Enterprise Management
- B.S. Human Development and Family Studies
- B.S. Information and Communication Technologies
- B.S. Management
- B.S. Professional Communication and Emerging Media
- B.S. Sustainable Management
- M.S. Career and Technical Education
- M.S. Construction Management
- M.S. Education
- M.S. Information and Communication Technologies
- M.S. Manufacturing Engineering
- M.S. Operations and Supply Management
- M.S. Sustainable Management
- M.S. Technical and Professional Communication
- M.S. Training and Human Resource Development
- M.S. Vocational Rehabilitation (Rehabilitation Counseling Concentration)
- M.F.A. in Design
- Ed.S. Career and Technical Education
- Ed.D. Career and Technical Education

The University of Wisconsin-Stout rendered a Self-Study which was thorough, comprehensive, and organized for effective and efficient review. It is apparent that the University understands the complexity of the tasks ahead and has placed at the forefront the design and development of its distance education programs through Stout Online. The University's Self-Study response provided an indicator of its ability to translate plans into sustainable institutional changes and improvements.

A USDLA Quality Standards Certification Team was assigned to the University. Drs. Marilyn Gardner, Janet McMahon, Robbie Melton, and George Collins read the Self-Study, conducted interviews, and set the stage for the field visit. Drs. Gardner and McMahon were on-site from February 12-14, 2014. The Visiting Team found that the University has a team of administrators, faculty, and staff who do not shirk, but rather relish the challenge of implementing distance education programs. As the University continues its development and expansion plans for its distance education programs, it is important for it to address the areas of recommendation that will require further attention and development; and use them as a foundation to create quality distance education opportunities for students. The final report reflects decisions reached by the entire team.

The careful expansion of its distance education offerings will present the University with numerous opportunities and challenges, all of which need to be simultaneously addressed to create a high quality experience for students, both in and outside of the classroom. The best preparation for any introduction and implementation of distance education programs is highly

detailed planning. The University has been engaged in this kind of planning for a significant period of time. Now, by incorporating the recommendations provided by the United States Distance Learning Quality Standards Team, the University will be ready to proceed with improvement, expansion, and implementation.

The Team noted that the University acknowledges the complexities it will face in implementing quality distance learning and is willing to make the requisite adjustments to move forward with any recommendations made by the United States Distance Learning Quality Standards Team. The University is determined to provide high quality distance education programs to its students and, as it has consistently done in the past, will place the quality of the student experience at the center of its decision making going forward.

The UW-Stout Online office and staff work with all academic and administrative units leveraging existing expertise and resources of the University to facilitate the offering of coursework through distance education. Stout Online office and staff are responsible for providing support for the development and delivery of courses, certifications, certificates, undergraduate, and graduate distance education programs. During the fall 2013 semester, Stout Online supported 1,551 students who were enrolled in distance education courses and programs.

The University of Wisconsin-Stout Online ...

- Assists departments in conceptualizing distance education objectives;
- Researches the desirability and potential for new distance education programs within University of Wisconsin-Stout's area of service; and
- Facilitates and supports student engagement with University of Wisconsin-Stout distance education programs by such means as support services, new student orientation, and other non-instructional services.

Doug Stevens, Director, engaged with USDLA and the Quality Standard Certification team in the fall of 2013. The objective was to validate the effectiveness of distance education services and the structure of the University of Wisconsin-Stout by means of an objective review by outside distance education professionals using the Quality Standards criteria.

### **Scope of Review**

All academic and administrative areas involved in the University's distance education programs were reviewed as part of the Quality Standards Certification process.

### ***The Quality Standards Review***

#### **The Team and Review Structure**

Quality Standards Certification review is a team effort involving the Association's national office and designated elected members of its Board of Directors and selected professional members. The goal of the team is to verify the University's compliance with the quality standards in a collaborative, practice-based engagement between working distance-learning professionals.

Pre-visitation review

- George R. Collins  
LearnTech Corporation

- Marilyn Gardner, Ph.D., J.D.  
Professor, Nova Southeastern University/Abraham S. Fischler School of Education and USDLA
- Janet McMahonill, Ph.D.  
Drake University
- Robbie Melton, Ph.D.,  
Associate Vice Chancellor  
Tennessee Board of Regents

#### On-site review team

- Marilyn Gardner, Ph.D., J.D.  
Professor, Nova Southeastern University/Abraham S. Fischler School of Education and USDLA
- Janet McMahonill, Ph.D.  
Drake University

The team conducted the review in four phases:

- Phase 1: Pre-visitation research, interviews, assimilation, and follow-up
- Phase 2: On-site visit
- Phase 3: Additional research, assimilation, and follow-up
- Phase 4: Findings/conclusions/recommendations

#### **Phase 1: Pre-visitation**

Preliminary discussions, between Doug Stevens, Director and Heidi Rabeneck, Program Manager at the University of Wisconsin-Stout Online and Drs. Gardner, McMahonill, Melton, and Collins at USDLA, validated a level of interest, level of leadership, legitimacy, and involvement in the process of self-improvement.

The pre-visitation review included the examination of the University of Wisconsin-Stout Self-Study, the sharing of various University documents, phone interviews with University students and faculty, and document and web searches that helped to provide the background of the scope of distance education services and the structure of University of Wisconsin-Stout. In addition, as preparation for the visit, the USDLA team reviewed University of Wisconsin-Stout syllabi to become familiar with the various courses and degree programs and the student services offered to distance education students.

#### **Phase 2: On-site Visit**

Dr. Janet McMahonill and Dr. Marilyn Gardner conducted an on-site visit to University of Wisconsin-Stout on February 12-14, 2014. George Collins and Dr. Robbie Melton were available for consultation both during and after the on-site visit.

The team was hosted by Doug Stevens, Director of Stout Online. Throughout the visit, the University administration, staff, and faculty were welcoming, candid, and open. The schedule included the following:

#### **February 12, 2014**

- Tour of the campus with Heidi Rabeneck, Program Manager, Stout Online

- Meeting with Phil Lyons - Vice Chancellor-Administrative and Student Life Service

### **February 13, 2014**

- Meeting with Doug Stevens, Director Stout Online
- Meeting with Joseph Bessie, Provost and Vice Chancellor of Academic and Student Affairs
- Meeting with Charles Sorensen, Chancellor
- Meeting with Meridith Drzakowski, Assistant Chancellor for Planning, Assessment, Research & Quality (PARQ)
- Meeting with Bob Butterfield (Instructional Resources Service Director), Cory Mitchell (Collection Department Librarian), and Ann Vogl (Distance Learning/Reference Librarian)
- Meeting with Administrative Information Technology: Doug Wahl (CIO), Sasha King (Telecom & Networking Director) and Jane Henderson (Learning Technology Services Director)
- Meeting with Distance Education Teaching Faculty and Program Directors Wendy Dittmann (BS MGMT), Renee Chandler (MS ED), Julie Watts (MS TPC) Carol Mooney (EdD CTE), Evan Sveum (staff - ICT) Deleana Strohl (MS VocRehab), Kevin Tharp (CSTEM - ICT) Julie Zaloudek (BS HDFS), David Ding (COM) Julie Peterson (MFA), Kris Schoonover (BS GEM), Marya Wilson (Adjunct-leadership), Jon Behling (Adjunct-ergonomist)
- Meeting with Administrators: Amy Luethmers (University Marketing Director), Pam Holzinger-Fuchs (Enrollment Services Exec Director)
- Meeting with Finance, Controller Kim Schulte-Shoberg (Controller), Curtis Wieland (Budget Director ASLS)
- Meeting with Academic Deans/Directors/Department Chairs: Abel Adekola (Dean, College of Management), Rich Rothaupt (Associate Dean, College of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), Mary Hopkins-Best (Dean, College of Education, Health and Human Sciences), Joan Thomas (Dean of Students), Brian McAlister (Director, School of Education), Chris Bendel (Chair, Mathematics, Statistics & Computer Science), Jerry Kapus (Chair, English & Philosophy), Diane Olson (Chair, Operations & Management), Steve Schlough (Chair, Apparel & Communication Technologies)
- Meeting with Stout Online Staff: Heidi Rabeneck (Program Manager), Amy Gullixson (Program Manager), Sandy White (Program Manager), Sara Anger (Student Support Specialist), Mandy Wolbert (Student Support Specialist), Julia Tronnier (Student Support Specialist), Jamison Patrick (Instructional Designer), Darci Ward (Registration and Records)

**February 14, 2014**

Debriefing Session

- Charles Sorensen (Chancellor)
- Jackie Weissenburger (Associate Chancellor)
- Joseph Bessie (Provost and Vice Chancellor of Academic and Student Affairs)
- Meridith Drzakowski (Assistant Chancellor for Planning, Assessment, Research & Quality)
- Phil Lyons (Vice Chancellor-Administrative and Student Life Services)
- Glendali Rodriguez (Associate Vice Chancellor)
- Doug Stevens (Stout Online Director)
- Heidi Rabeneck (Stout Online Program Manager)

**Phase 3: Follow-up, Additional Research, and Assimilation**

Following the on-site review, a detailed visit report was prepared by Drs. Gardner, Robinson, Melton, and Collins. The USDLA team caucused on the findings, both by email and in audio conference to clarify salient elements of the review.

A key element of the certification process was to validate how the distance education functions administered by the University conformed to USDLA Quality Standards. The validation of Quality Standards at the University of Wisconsin-Stout is summarized under Phase 4 and then a matrix of the standards is included as an Appendix.

**Phase 4: Findings/Conclusions/Areas of Recommendation**

In this section, the Quality Standards Team will highlight salient points from review of the distance education programs at University of Wisconsin-Stout that are serviced by Stout Online. Based on that discussion, we recommend the award of USDLA Quality Standards Certification.

**Standards**

The “Standards of Practice” articulate expectations for USDLA-Certified distance learning programs. The standards are organized in five functional areas. Within those five areas, there are a total of 117 standards.

The five "Standards of Practice" areas are:

1. Prerequisites
2. Administration, Leadership, and Management
3. Learner Affairs
  - a. Teaching and Learning
  - b. Infrastructure

The University of Wisconsin-Stout was evaluated on the 117 USDLA Quality Standards. In the review, the University’s distance education programs received the following ratings. On fifty-eight (58) Quality Standard rubrics of “Target”, “Satisfactory” and “Deficient”, the Certification Team found 34 standards on “Target” and 23 were “Satisfactory” and 1 was “Deficient.” On 59 “Yes” and “No” rubrics, the Certification Team found that there were 56



standards that met expectations with a “Yes” response, 2 standards that did not meet the criteria and received a “No” response, and one “Not Applicable.” It is important to note that a designation of “Target” is the highest Quality Standard rating and exemplifies that the University is meeting the requirements and expectations for quality distance education programs.

### **Standard 1: Provider Pre-requisites**

Institutions of higher learning have many common traits. From the perspective of an outsider, what sets the University of Wisconsin-Stout apart from the rest is a commitment to *quality*.

In this context, *quality* is distinct from *excellence*. Virtually all universities express a commitment to academic excellence. Often, though, in an academic setting, excellence is more of an abstract expression of lofty intent than it is a dedication to a rigorous matrix of policies and procedures focused on making profound process improvements. The University, though, “gets it.” It understands quality as a pathway to achieve true excellence.

The mission statement of the University of Wisconsin-Stout provides the institution its direction and character. The purpose and objectives of the University of Wisconsin-Stout are clearly represented in its Mission Statement. Moreover, all the educational components of the University, including its programs of study and environment for intellectual growth are consistent with the mission of the University. The University is committed to high ethical standards and complies with the USDLA Code of Conduct.

The mission of the University, since its inception, focuses on the importance of having a foundation for studies that leads to a solid preparation for a career or for post-graduate studies. The University of Wisconsin-Stout has made every effort to comply with the standards, policies, and requests set forth by the United States Distance Learning Association Certification Standards and noted that it will continue to do so. Any requests for information have been met in a timely and open fashion that is consistent with the high degree of openness and integrity that form the foundation of the University’s operations and interactions with the public and governing bodies.

The Visiting Team found the University’s distance education plans specific and realistic and within the context of its mission. The University’s mission focuses on providing an education that is both purposeful and pivotal for its students including those enrolled in its distance education programs. It is apparent that by remaining mindful of economic trends that project the greatest increase in employment opportunities, its distance education programs will serve its student body and the mission of the University. The nature and character of the University of Wisconsin-Stout is defined not only by its stated goals and objectives, but also by the careful and considered manner by which these goals and objectives are being carried out and by the planning for and expansion of its distance education programs.

Finally, at various times, students, staff, and alumni have all influenced the direction of the University and have offered insights into how the University can be more effective in its mission. These ideas are developed among the appropriate constituents and then refined for presentation and adoption in the mission statement.

## **FINDINGS AND AREAS OF RECOMMENDATION**

### **Strengths:**

1. The University's mission statement has been consistent for a long period of time, lending stability to University operations.
2. The University's mission is well understood by an experienced group of faculty, staff, and administrators who are deeply concerned with the progress of each individual student. The University is serious about the mission of education.
3. The University's mission and core values are supported by a foundation based on honesty and integrity.
4. There is positive, engaged, and visionary leadership that is student-focused.
5. Accreditation and other recognition credentials are impressive. The Baldrige Award is especially noteworthy.

### **Areas of Recommendation:**

1. In tandem with its strategic plan, develop a University-wide *Distance Education Policy Statement* regarding the role and mission of distance education. The *Distance Education Policy Statement* should articulate the distance education mission of the University and how the addition of distance education courses and programs complements the mission statement. In addition, the *Distance Education Policy Statement* should be specific in its statement of objectives enabling prospective distance education students to be well informed about the purpose of the education they will receive. The *Distance Education Policy Statement* should be consistent with the University's founding purpose and philosophy.
2. In future reviews, the Chancellor should ensure that the *Distance Education Policy* continues to define the core strategy of distance education programs in the form of explicit statements of vision and strategic direction.
3. Any review of the University mission by the University administration, faculty, students, and alumni should include a reflection of the impact that distance education programs are having on the University and its mission.
4. Further expansion of distance education programs is likely to bring significant changes to the current University culture. The Visiting Committee suggests that continued attention should be given to encouraging open communication that accepts criticisms and suggestions which will be the key to achieving and sustaining quality distance education programs.

## **Standard 2: Administration, Leadership and Management**

### **2.1 Integrity**

The Visiting Team observed that the academic and administrative leadership of the University of Wisconsin-Stout believes that the only way to ensure that its mission is realized is

to consistently subscribe to, and exemplify, high standards of integrity and openness. In the Visiting Team's judgment, the University's current commitment to integrity will continue with further implementation of its distance education programs. This commitment to integrity extends to all members of the University, including staff, faculty, and students. This is also reflected in the University's promotional and informational materials that accurately portray the University and its academic offerings.

In addition, the Visiting Team believes that all interactions between members of the University and the external public are meant to be informative and guided by honesty. To ensure this, the Director of Stout Online and his staff regularly collaborate with deans, directors, Department Chairs, faculty, and administration in an effort to stay apprised of curricula requirements and modifications, thereby allowing information provided to the public to be timely and accurate. Enrolled students are made aware of their rights and responsibilities through clearly published policies and procedures in standard publications. This is further complemented by the clear guidance they receive from staff members who work collaboratively in an effort to direct daily operations in a manner that exhibits fairness. Personnel and faculty policies and procedures that govern faculty and staff are clearly published. The University is responsible in its efforts to attract students who are fully qualified to enter the institution's distance education programs and who demonstrate a likelihood of success.

Furthermore, the University achieves a consistently high level of candor, clarity, and fairness through a combination of clearly published policies and procedures in readily available publications as well as through open dialogue and ongoing review of policies at all levels of the University.

## **2.2 Structure and Organization**

A dean leads each college, with department heads and faculty managing academic objectives. Chapter 36 of the General Statutes of Wisconsin requires the formation of additional decision-making functions called "Shared Governance" within the faculty, academic staff, and students. This means that, in addition to the Chancellor, these functions have primary responsibility for the formation, development, and review of policies concerning their functions. For faculty, "primary" means "formal power to initiate action, carry out reviews, and make recommendations which result in legislation" regarding their institution's "academic and educational activities and faculty personnel matters."

The University has three governance bodies: (1) Faculty Senate, (2) Senate of Academic Staff, and (3) Stout Student Association. The concept of shared governance provides for equal representation in the decision-making process, but can also complicate the organizational structure and inhibit rapid decision-making.

It is apparent from Visiting Team meetings with management, staff, and faculty that the University responds to students' needs. There are effective communications and mutual support among members of the senior leadership group. A productive working relationship exists between the Chancellor and his staff. This contributes to balancing and integrating educational program priorities with financial resource projections and constraints. The open communications among senior administrators should contribute to building a solid foundation for the further expansion of distance education programs as well as on the underlying administrative structure and governance procedures.

A significant strength at this stage is the results-oriented leadership of Chancellor Charles Sorensen and Associate Chancellor Jackie Weissenburger. In addition, members of the Administration who met with Visiting Team members support the continued introduction and expansion of distance education programs. Administration stated that the rationale for introducing distance education programs at the University includes extending student opportunities, raising the overall status of the University, improving the quality of the teaching staff, responding to changes in academia expected by students, and providing a solid foundation of knowledge in a distance education environment that could be transferred to other University degree programs.

### **2.3 Academic Development**

The University recognizes that the primary means for developing and improving its distance education programs at the University lies with its faculty. The goal is to obtain qualified personnel who can best support the mission of the University. In the pursuit of this goal, the University noted that candidates are hired based upon educational credentials and/or experience, and, where appropriate, industry experience and/or licensure. Hiring criteria of the University reflect its desire to offer students excellence in teaching and a diversity of educational and professional expertise. As a result of its meetings with faculty, deans, directors, chairs, administrators, and students, the Visiting Team is impressed with the consistent dedication of current online faculty of the University to student success. Many faculty members, especially in the School of Education, are extremely well-prepared to teach online.

### **2.4 Quality Management**

The short- and long- term distance learning goals of the University focus on three core elements:

- Be known as offering the best distance education programs in the University of Wisconsin system as well as one of “the best” providers of distance education programs in the state of Wisconsin and where authorized;
- Maintain a strong commitment to students’ learning needs, personal growth, and professional development in all distance education programs, services, and administrative functions of the University; and
- Elevating the performance expectations and capabilities of students and the faculty in its distance education programs which will lead to benefits for all programs and services of the University.

The University realizes that strategic planning and the implementation of evaluation plans are critical to the success of the distance education programs and are dynamic and subject to revision over time. The Visiting Committee saw evidence of a high level of planning undertaken by the administration and faculty pursuant to distance education courses and programs.

The Visiting Team notes the University’s success in implementing a continuous improvement cycle. Objective data is gathered and analyzed for quality management and employees participate in the quality process in most aspects of course and program level development of its distance education programs. This includes specific profiles of knowledge and skills that students should master upon course and program completion.

## **2.5 Financial Management**

Financial management is conducted in an open and honest fashion. Publications undergo periodic and collaborative review to ensure that all areas and aspects of the University are accurately represented. Print and electronic media are evaluated to ensure that their content matches published material. As information regarding the University undergoes change, the University is careful to modify its public disclosure or to include addenda for its distance education students. Members of the University who interact with the public understand the importance of remaining aware of pertinent information for prospective distance education students, allowing them to make informed financial decisions.

As a tuition driven institution, the University has significant experience in enrollment forecasting. As a result, the University has confidence in the enrollment projections and in the continued expansion of its distance education programs.

## **FINDINGS AND AREAS OF RECOMMENDATION**

### **Strengths**

1. A significant strength at this stage is the results-oriented leadership of Chancellor Charles Sorensen and Associate Chancellor Jackie Weissenburger. It is this culture that will allow the University to thrive in an environment of almost continual change and renewal.
2. The University of Wisconsin-Stout Online has outstanding leadership that is both student focused and is academically engaged. Stout Online staff and Director Stevens are flexible, optimistic, and entrepreneurial. Their advanced degrees and credentials add to the educational integrity of the Stout Online Department.
3. The University of Wisconsin-Stout has made significant progress in its overall preparation to offer its distance education courses and programs. The Visiting Committee's judgment is that the plans and activities to date have strived to meet the standards of academic excellence that are clearly apparent in the University's traditional classroom programs. The University has been thoughtful in establishing direction-setting priorities and identifying near term decisions and actions that should be taken to move forward toward successful introduction, expansion, and operation of distance education degree programs.
4. The greatest strength with regard to human resources exists within the staff and faculty themselves. The University has faculty and staff that are comprised of professionals, who bring a wealth of experience and expertise to infuse their classroom instruction and develop and support new initiatives. Beyond these credentials, faculty and staff members have proven themselves to be dedicated and caring toward students while upholding the University's quality of education in the on-ground classroom setting. This, in turn, extends to students in distance education programs.
5. The staff and faculty of the University provide a wealth of business and professional expertise resulting in distance education enrichment and the continued relevancy of the institution's programs.
6. A bond exists between the staff, faculty, and the students of the University and online faculty and staff are seriously focused on the mission of education.

7. There are a large number of on-ground “co-curricular” organizations and events for traditional students. They are diverse and creative, both supporting the curriculum and extending it to new areas that support student learning in an advanced manner. They also create a collegial culture. Therefore, the foundation is in place to extend these student clubs, organizations, and events to distance education learners.
8. There is a broad-based desire both on the part of the University, and on the part of Stout Online, for online courses to meet the same high levels of academic excellence as are clearly apparent in the University’s on-ground classroom programs.
9. The commitment to excellence is apparent not only programmatically, but also on an individual level. The Provost, deans, chairs, program directors, staff, and faculty demonstrate dedication and commitment toward students and a high quality of educational process, both in the on-ground classroom and in online learning.
10. An administration that recognizes change and innovation are a natural complement to academic excellence. This led to the formation of Stout Online, its adaptation and growth, and is receptive to further enhancements via this review by the United States Distance Learning Association.
11. The ESURC Self-Study, the Strategic Plan, and the recommendations of the Customized Instruction Task Force, which were on-point with many of the findings of the USDLA Team, indicate that the University is willing to identify areas of improvement and is committed to addressing them in the coming year.
12. The use of Smarter Measure to assess readiness of online learning is powerful.
13. University Marketing is ready, willing, and able to work closely with the Colleges and departments to support and improve the distance education print and electronic collateral of the Colleges, departments, and Stout Online.
14. There is a strong presence and commitment of Enrollment Services and University Advancement to collaborate with the Colleges and departments as they expand their distance learning programs.
15. The use of mobile apps to pay bills online is an impressive service addition.

**Areas of Recommendation:**

1. The University will need to develop and implement the next stage of in-depth and comprehensive planning to ensure that the highest quality of academic standards are met when expanding and implementing its distance education courses and programs.
2. The Visiting Team believes the current organizational model will not work as distance education programs expand at the University. Distance education authority should be organized and led by a single entity. The adjectives of “disconnect” and “silos” were repeatedly used. The Team observed many competing interests and “turf” issues among the Colleges, departments, IT, and faculty. Although these issues are not uncommon in Higher Education, Stout will benefit from a more cohesive team approach. The team found that Colleges and departments vary dramatically in their faculty training, syllabi, course

evaluations, marketing, and in many aspects of developing and delivering their online programs. The quality of cross-communication and collaboration with Stout Online also varies by College and department. Stout Online is ready to embrace, unite, and lead the University's online programs. It is critical that there is an organizational structure that supports, and is responsible for, the success and failure of the University's online programs. There should not be multiple entities vying for control and support. Students and faculty interviewed were not clear who to contact regarding varying online questions.

Recommendations to help implement the aforementioned might include the following:

- a. Associate and Assistant Chancellors, Provost, deans, directors, chairs, faculty, department staff, and campus leaders need to be the recipients of, and fully engaged in, the delivery of "messages" that tie online education to the fundamental institutional mission and priorities. Distance education is mainstream; it is a critical component of UW-Stout's strategic growth plan and needs to be consistently presented in that way to the University's various constituencies.
  - b. UW-Stout Online, or similar entity, should be empowered by the administration to lead the University's online programs and to collaborate with the deans, directors, and chairs of the Colleges as well as administrators, department staff, and faculty.
  - c. UW-Stout Online staff need to be involved in all university-wide meetings, committees, and councils including short- and long-term planning and assessment. Stout Online needs to conduct forums that will better communicate its programs, projects, and activities to the departments and Colleges. A few program directors stated they were not sure what responsibilities Stout Online performed, thus leaving an administrative vacuum that will be filled in an unsystematic or fragmentary manner.
3. A review of potential resources-both financial and personnel- should be completed to ensure that UW-Stout can sustain its margin of excellence in light of increased student enrollment which will inevitably add to the workload of many operating units.
4. Faculty members are critical to the success of the expansion of the University's distance education courses and programs. It is suggested:
- a. The University considers initiating a required *Faculty Online Training Certificate* with "tiers of expertise" for faculty who teach online.
  - b. Establish a consistent faculty support compensation model for faculty creating online courses (the compensation could include release time, stipend, graduate assistant, equipment, conference travel, etc.).
  - c. Academic administrators and supervisors, for both faculty and staff (where appropriate), who are required to support and evaluate distance education staff, faculty, and support services should document having taught one online course and/or participating in delivering online services, to better understand the online process and demands.

- d. Encourage faculty to use more synchronous tools in their classes. One suggestion is to require a minimum of two- or -three synchronous classes a semester including one scheduled during the first two weeks of the semester. These synchronous classes should be recorded for those who were unable to attend the synchronous class.
  - e. Increase the training for, and the use of, engagement tools in all distance education courses.
  - f. Distance education professional growth and development should be systemized and required for all distance faculty and adjuncts throughout UW-Stout.
5. The University needs to better distinctly brand its “Online Programs.” Currently, most Colleges and departments market their own programs and, often, continue to target their historic prospective student base. However, marketing courses to online adults is very different than marketing and communicating with on-ground students. In an effort to maximize the University’s online presence, University Marketing should be responsible for packaging the University’s online product and be the catalyst. They should be the conduit for that marketing.
  6. The University should develop an integrated model for describing on-campus and online courses and programs. Describing students as “customized instruction” (CI) students is not productive. They are UW-Stout students. The designation of a “CI” student implies that one is getting a different and/or inferior education. Doing so muddles marketing and branding.
  7. The assignment of online courses to part- and full-time faculty should be given the same priority status as on-ground courses. Seemingly, some departments and Colleges place the assignment of online courses secondary to their on-ground classes. Several part-time online faculty noted that they received course assignments with only a 7-day notice. Preparing to teach an online class is much more time consuming and intensive than on-ground course. This impacts the quality of online courses because of a lack of preparation time.
  8. Both administrators and staff suggest that a huge challenge is the variability in tuition pricing between online and on-ground classes. This effects many areas such as registration, sections of classes offered, support services, student enrollment, lost revenue, and so forth. The Team realizes that this is a formidable challenge. One approach is to enlist the key stakeholders in developing strategies to minimize the negative impact on students, services, and enrollment.
  9. Some key personnel continue to advocate that online students should be required to physically visit campus one day a semester/ year in order to become immersed in the UW-Stout culture. This suggestion indicates a misconception of who Stout online students are and will be. This misunderstanding of students who study at a distance could be, consciously or unconsciously, negatively impacting enrollment and service support.



10. Make data about online classes more granular so variables can be more readily analyzed. Review internal data and external research concerning online learning that will help inform an expansion of quality online learning. The analysis and distribution of formative and summative quantitative and qualitative data of distance education student learning is critical to effective growth.
11. Ensure that academic continuity (disaster recovery) plans are available to faculty, staff, and students. None of the faculty, staff, or students interviewed knew how they would continue their work responsibilities if there was a disaster. We did hear a few inconsistent, ad hoc responses to unforeseen circumstances.

### **Standard 3: Learner Affairs**

#### **3.1 Recruitment/admissions**

The University of Wisconsin-Stout's student enrollment process is the same for distance education programs as on-ground programs. The University has a comprehensive and detailed Enrollment Management Plan that incorporates the University's distance education learning expansion goals.

The University of Wisconsin-Stout is dedicated to granting admission not only in an open and non-discriminatory fashion, but in an environment that actively fosters and encourages diversity. Admission to the University is based on the likelihood for success as measured through non-discriminatory means, such as the review of past academic work on transcripts as well as professional involvement documented on resumes and professional letters of reference. The fairness of these admissions procedures is demonstrated through statements, both in the University's catalog and web site. In addition, the University is on record for admitting men and women of any age, race, color, religious belief, national or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, and marital or parental status.

#### **3.2 Guidance and counseling**

The University is committed to providing an environment that fosters the intellectual and personal development of its students. To accomplish this, the success of distance education and on-ground programs depends on effective and efficient guidance and counseling. Students are required to have an academic advisor. The Visiting Team agrees that the University provides quality academic advising for an ethnically and culturally diverse student population, equipping them with the capability to ensure their retention and progress toward graduation, to fully realize opportunities opened by higher education, and to build a solid foundation for life-long academic, personal, and career successes.

#### **3.3 Orientation**

The University has an orientation program that includes printed materials that describes the enrollment process and other resources available to new and returning students. Registration and course information are readily accessible online.

### **3.4 Fees and refunds**

Explicit fee and refund policies are published online for prospective distance education students.

### **3.5 Records and transcripts**

As with on-ground students, distance learners' records are safeguarded, transcripts include provider information and relevant learner information, and they are archived in perpetuity.

### **3.6 Grievances**

The University is responsive to grievances and complaints are used for quality improvement. The Visiting Team found that the University responds to concerns/complaints in a reasonable and unbiased manner.

## **FINDINGS AND AREAS OF RECOMMENDATION**

### **Strengths**

1. University offices work together to ensure that the University is able to attract students with a likelihood of success in its distance education programs and that they are placed in courses commensurate with their learning levels.
2. The University annually identifies a host of issues dealing with retention and highlights the means for addressing needs in those areas.
3. The USDLA team was impressed with the caliber of support provided to online faculty by Stout Online staff as per comments from "faculty interviews." The staff's level of support is exemplary.
4. Brainfuse tutoring support is a wonderful addition.
5. The School of Education leads the way with its success in online training for faculty, syllabi that are designed with content and online learning detail, and faculty and staff's positive attitudes and differentiated instruction.
6. Improving online career services to include career links and Skyping conferencing with online students are noteworthy areas of emphasis.
7. The Library and Instructional Resource Services Director have the forward momentum needed to develop digital resources. Their mantra "think outside the book" is energizing. They receive input from a digital resource committee comprised of students, faculty, registrar, and Vice Chancellor.
8. Student interview comments included:

➤ "Looked all around and came back to UW-Stout." [*present student*]

- “Tegrity lectures in my undergraduate courses really helped, I wish more professors would use them.” *[student]*
- “Faculty are very responsive and get back right away.” *[present student]*
- “I was a little worried that it’d be easy for me to blow off my classes because they were online. In reality, they have been very engaging.” *[present student]*
- “I love this program. It’s been great being online. I was a little nervous about being forced into synchronous lessons because of my personal schedule, but it’s been fine.” *[present student]*
- “I could not do this program if I could not do it online.” *[present student]*
- “I was impressed with Stout’s offerings. I have a major that’s not common. I’d never given Stout a thought because it’s 4-5 hours away.” *[present student]*
- “Overall, I’m happy with what I’ve learned and look forward to getting back into the workforce.” *[present student]*
- “I still talk to my faculty advisor/faculty chair.” *[graduate]*
- “Stout was the third college I’d attended. I was in a completely different major but Stout helped me transfer courses and set up a new program that helped me get college over with!” *[graduate]*
- “One of my favorite things in my introduction to Stout – I’d been out of school for 13 years – and I was making a plan to actually graduate.” *[present student]*

### **Areas of Recommendation:**

1. Continue to identify technology tools that will support students in having one-on-one discussions with their professors. Students want to interact with professors more. The ability to interact in this manner, and the underlying technical competencies, differ greatly among faculty.
2. A formal plan should be developed that encourages online student involvement for student leadership, campus clubs, organizations, etc. In addition, identify, evaluate, support, and ensure that co-curricular organizations and events, if not incorporated with those on-ground, are of the quality offered to on-ground students. These organizations and events create a collegial culture that becomes even more important as the university advances further with online degrees.
3. Research a “peer mentor” program for online students.
4. Increase tutoring services and support to online students and prominently advertise to faculty and students.
5. Explore additional forums and methods by which concerns, issues, and grievances arising from distance education programs may be resolved. As the distance education student body grows, the nature of issues and grievances may require a dedicated and non-biased forum for the consideration and resolution of concerns and appeals at a distance.

6. Develop an orientation learning module for D2L as a prerequisite for all new and readmitted students. It should also include links to key academic support centers and personnel. One suggestion is to better prepare online students for their first course. It is important for online students to have a positive online experience which is fostered by their focusing on course content and not on the technology. Many students (especially graduate students) mentioned that they were in a “sink or swim” situation and might not have continued if the professor had not held their hand. One graduate student stated the following: “Thank goodness I received my undergraduate degree online at Stout. . . .as a graduate student I would not have had any idea how to begin my courses if I did not have that previous online background. UW-Stout needs to do a better job so graduate students are comfortable in an online environment before they take a course.”
7. Investigate more fully the implications of providing accelerated courses. Having some courses not tied to the UW-Stout’s on-campus academic calendar would be a new paradigm for the University, but there is ample precedent for it in online learning and students expressed a strong interest in this flexibility.
8. Explore the possibility of offering the first online “honors program” for the University of Wisconsin system.
9. Continue to ensure that all University catalogs, policies, procedures, and forms are online, kept current, and formatted. University forms and records should be designed where students may complete their information online and sign electronically.
10. There should be further evaluation and analysis of how best to accommodate students with disabilities including ADA and 504 compliance.
11. There needs to be a more robust system to track online students who drop out of UW-Stout. It is important to keep track of returning students as well as to regularly follow up, and encourage enrollment, with those students who only planned to withdraw for a semester.
12. The library was highly regarded by students once they realized its importance and availability. Faculty should be proactive in engaging online students with library resources at the beginning of a course and library information and resources should be required to be included in all D2L course templates. Many students said they were halfway through their program before they realized what a valuable resource the library was. Earlier engagement of library staff with online students is important.
13. Related to Library support:
  - a. Enumerate goals for library usage in online classes;
  - b. Add items to course evaluations to assess student awareness and use of Library;
  - c. Publicize library along with library help desk hours for distance students;
  - d. Share library live tracking data to determine the specific use by UW-Stout online students; and
  - e. Use tutorials and other special features of the library.

14. IT support primarily focuses on equipment that is distributed to on-ground undergraduate students. Many faculty and students struggle with a lack of IT knowledge and support for anything other than that distributed by the University. It is imperative that IT support staff be further trained and gain expertise to support a wider range of computers, tablets, mobile devices, and technology tools used by online students and faculty.
15. Identify all processes that are not user-friendly or accessible to distance students. For example, some segments of non-degree online students still can only apply by filling in a PDF application and then either faxing or mailing it.
16. The University should continue to support the use of technology that allows remote academic and career counseling to distance learning students to ensure an immersive, consistent, and quality learning environment.
17. There is a need to increase the mobile profile by increasing training and opportunities for faculty and staff to engage with and use enabling technologies. UW-Stout should further research and incorporate new technologies including mobile learning so students can better interact and further connect at a distance.

## **Standard 4: Teaching and Learning**

### **4.1 Curriculum**

Faculty members are responsible for the development of course curricula in distance education programs. Some have received training and are fully informed as to presentation of content, strategies, pedagogical processes, and best practices for working with students at a distance. The aim is to encourage more dialogue and innovation with respect to integrating all online faculty's course studies and industry-oriented professional material studies with distance education best practices.

The curriculum planning and implementation for on-ground and distance education programs ensures that students are exposed to industry-relevant technology/and or concepts beginning in their first semester and then increasing their proficiency and understanding throughout their program. Each department and College functions differently in processing curriculum items prior to submission to the Curriculum and Instruction Committee (CIC). The objectives of the CIC include: to review, develop and recommend new and/or modified curriculum policies; to serve as an academic forum to discuss and act upon proposals for credit-producing learning experiences as well as major and sub-major academic programs and specializations; to encourage a trans-disciplinary approach to curriculum and instructional growth; to promote academic excellence and educational opportunity and encourage the use of appropriate standards throughout the curriculum.

### **4.2 Course Structure and Instruction**

In most cases, distance education courses are developed by a collaboration of the faculty of the Colleges. Stout Online supports the online faculty in the delivery of online courses.

The University understands that the expansion of its distance education programs creates unique challenges and opportunities for faculty recruitment, deployment, and development. While the University has historically maintained successful protocols in each of these areas, further expansion of distance education will require a review to assess sustainability across all programs.

Timely interaction and engagement between faculty and students are critical to student success and are markedly different online than in an on-ground course. The success of distance education programs will depend on having faculty and curricula that engage and use varied learning strategies, authentic assessments, and an appropriate structure.

### **4.3 Learner Evaluation**

The University's mission statement and objectives are the driving forces behind all program planning and evaluation initiatives at the University. The Visiting Team discussed the online programs' learner evaluations as it relates to the University's teaching and learning pedagogy and methodology.

Policies related to learner evaluation and retention were formulated with the University's mission in mind. These policies are crafted with measures for intervention by caring faculty and staff in keeping with the mission's emphasis on fostering a student-centered learning environment. Many of the same evaluation and retention protocols also focus on the distance education learner.

Finally, it is the Chancellor's belief that broad-based participation in the program evaluation of distance education is essential to the success of the institution. Therefore, individuals at all levels of the University – administration, faculty, and non-academic departments – need to more actively participate in this process.

### **4.4 Program Assessment**

The integration of program assessment and the planning and evaluation process for both the on-ground and distance education student are considered by the administration to be vital to the growth of the University and to the success of its students. The University conducts assessments which include academic programs as well as academic and administrative support units. Each unit is expected to articulate outcomes, measure attainment of the outcomes, and devise improvement plans based upon the results of the measurement. For academic units, outcomes are to include student learning outcomes.

The Planning, Assessment, Research & Quality (PARQ) Office supports the collection of assessment data which is used to both assess the effectiveness of the institution and to aid the University in the development and revision of planning programs and strategies. The Visiting Team reviewed past data from the on-ground and distance educational institutional surveys. These institutional effectiveness surveys are used for the evaluation of the distance education programs. In addition, the PARQ Office publishes program retention and attrition data.

Assessment is integrated into many facets of UW-Stout: Assessment in the Major (annual), Planning and Review Committee (7-year cycle), etc. Each program has an assessment plan in place and reports an Assessment in the Major each fall to the Provost. As part of the Planning and Review Committee, surveys are sent to students in the program, core faculty inside and core faculty outside of the department as well as the program's advisory committee. This provides a cross section of participants who assist in program improvement.

The University is committed to consistent and collaborative assessment, evaluation, and planning. The University has many forums, both formal and informal, where planning and assessment are conducted. All planning and evaluation are collaborative and conducted with a focus on achieving effectiveness and improvement.

Retention and graduation data is used during program assessment. A sampling of students are surveyed as to the reasons for withdrawal. As part of the program assessment process, placement rates are reported and employers surveyed about how graduates perform in the workplace. In addition, graduates are periodically surveyed concerning their preparation for the workplace. The Career Services office maintains an annual employment report. There are also Alumni surveys at 1-year and 5-years after graduation.

The Visiting Team believes that it is important that direct assessment of student learning takes place when degree programs collect student work that can be used to inform the program improvement process. However, it should include information that evaluates online teaching and learning effectiveness. Currently, the individual Colleges have responsibility for curriculum, program, faculty, and student assessment and evaluations including distance education programs. Systemically assessing the effectiveness of evaluation activities university-wide becomes more important as the University expands its distance education programs. Distance education expansion will challenge the University to ensure that goals regarding online student achievement, quality support services, retention, and graduation are met.

### **FINDINGS AND AREAS OF RECOMMENDATION**

#### **Strengths:**

1. The University has been thoughtful in establishing strategic plans, direction-setting priorities, and identifying near- and far- term decisions and actions, and in developing planning and assessment strategies to move forward toward successful operation and expansion of online degree courses and programs.
2. There are many university-wide policies and procedures in place to expand distance education courses and programs.
3. Many faculty, students, and staff acknowledged Stout Online staff as responsive and critical to their professional and personal success at UW-Stout.
4. The University has a system for the collection and use of quantitative data that is regularly used to provide accurate measures in planning and evaluation.
5. Many faculty, departments, and staff are enthusiastic about implementing distance education courses and degree programs. They are willing to transfer their in-class expertise to the distance education environment.
6. The curriculum development process is driven by faculty, industry, and administration input allowing consistent infusion of industry-related expertise that benefits the learning process.

7. The School of Education leads the way with an assessment system that collects and analyzes data on application qualifications, candidate and graduate performance and unit operations in order to evaluate and improve the performance of faculty, staff, the unit, and programs.
8. The Office of Planning, Assessment, Research, and Quality (PARQ) has been excellent at facilitating the collection, analysis, and distribution of formative and summative quantitative and qualitative data of online learning and encouraging and employing a participatory and collaborative planning process to research and assessment.
9. Contracting with Noel Levitz for a comparison of online satisfaction with national averages was a tangible commitment to quality improvement.
10. The University has made significant progress in its overall preparation to offer online courses and programs. The Visiting Committee's judgment is that the plans and activities to date have striven to meet the same high standards of academic excellence which are clearly apparent in the University's on-ground classroom programs.
11. Stout Online has detailed enrollment targets that are based on defensible assumptions.
12. A few faculty comments include:
  - "I taught for another large public university before coming to Stout. Support at Stout is far superior to what I'd been getting there." *[instructor]*
  - "We work hard to delight our students." *[instructor]*
  - "I can't speak highly enough about my experiences at Stout. They are very open with the online teachers and provide good communications." *[instructor]*
  - "Stout somehow recruits good students and they naturally work at a high level of academic accomplishment. It's a pleasure to teach them!" *[instructor]*

**Areas of Recommendation:**

1. The entire UW-Stout community needs to understand that distance learning is vital to the future relevance of the University and to its constituencies. This can be buttressed by looking at higher education, including statistical trends, on a national basis. Many UW-Stout faculty believe that too many of their colleagues are "oblivious" to the educational currents beyond their immediate classroom walls.
2. Staff and faculty want a better understanding of the Chancellor's priorities for distance learning. Faculty and staff would be empowered to advance institutional goals if they had a clearer sense of the Chancellor's vision.
3. The University's evaluative protocols will need to be used extensively to monitor the progress of distance education. The goal to broadly expand distance education will impact the current policies, procedures, IT, operations, and culture. In light of this, the Visiting Committee recommends that there be university-wide distance education planning meetings convened by the Office of the Chancellor to address the following:



- a. As a team, review of the University's strategic plans and goals for distance education including the goals and benchmarks for each College, department and office. This will help all stakeholders better understand the individual College and department connections needed to achieve the University's distance education goals.
  - b. Encourage more broad-based participation in the program evaluation of its distance education programs with individuals at all levels of the University – administration, faculty, and non-academic departments – participating.
  - c. Investigate more cross-departmental/College planning assessment of online programs among areas that are vital to the University's mission.
  - d. An annual university-wide collection of all student course evaluations in all Colleges and distinguishing between distance and on-ground respondents. Data should be shared with all campus leaders and assistance provided in interpreting data as appropriate.
  - e. Continue to seek open dialogue and feedback from all stakeholders (faculty, students, program directors, chairs, deans, administrators, etc.) in order to (1) update Distance Education goals, highlight areas of achievement, and benchmark completion, and (2) identify concerns and problems in establishing a plan of action.
  - f. Further evaluate data related to online courses.
  - g. Identify partnerships, both internal and external, that can be responsive to the University's evolving needs in its distance education programs.
  - h. Continue to ensure that all university-wide planning and evaluation initiatives include Stout Online and are sufficiently broad-based to include both those guiding and those implementing the initiative.
4. Stout Online should further research and work with the Colleges, departments, and offices to:
- a. Evaluate any areas needing improvement for those students who will geographically remain at a distance while pursuing their degree.
  - b. Develop an annual online faculty survey which asks for faculty perspectives on the services and resources provided to online faculty. This systematic outreach should, ideally, be anonymous, and could include professional development suggestions and solicit ideas for improvement.
  - c. Identify and standardize important online information and resources that must be included in all online syllabi and within D2L courses.
  - d. Investigate why some classes lack interaction and engagement.
  - e. Identify small rewards/compensation for distance education faculty and staff that go "above and beyond" in developing new courses.

- f. Pursue the use of broader (authentic) assessment strategies in lieu of tests and exams in an online environment.
- g. Review distance education programs to assess their compatibility university-wide in terms of online faculty recruitment, deployment, and development.
- h. Apply the same principles and practices that are used to identify and support field placements (practica and student teaching assignments) for on-ground and apply them to distance learning students.
- i. Implement synchronous technologies for certain academic purposes such as enabling student group collaboration and offering archived course sessions.
- j. Explore the feasibility of those who manage, oversee, and evaluate distance learning personnel or programs to periodically teach online.
- k. Host the infrastructure for building and supporting new courses and refurbishing current courses.
- l. Identify possible incentives beyond salary increases for faculty to develop online courses. Awarding stipends, designing better lead times, funding conference travel, or offering expert assistance are all possibilities.
- m. Utilize the resources of national associations.
- n. Target the opportunity to extend online courses to military bases and home-school learners.
- o. Establish institution-wide policies for distance education faculty in areas such as the response times to students and the maintenance of on-line (versus on-ground) office hours.
- p. Increase the number of faculty certified as Quality Matters reviewers and trainers.
- q. Serve as a catalyst for online faculty sharing and meeting with other online faculty members on a variety of subjects (e.g., how they have incorporated interactivity into their online classes). Professional development for those teaching online should include an annual one or two day retreat for distance education faculty to share their experiences and to model quality distance learning courses. Many faculty- and especially adjuncts- expressed an interest in having an annual face-to-face.
- r. Adopt a software paradigm that will support students having one-on-one discussions with the faculty. Tools such as Skype, Go-to-Meeting, FaceTime, Polycom RealPresence, or WebEx would allow teachers to provide online office hours. Faculty want to use a range of tools to further engage their students.
- s. Engage and include part-time faculty in such activities as Brown Bags and any training sessions. These could be offered live as well as archived and made

accessible for their viewing. Faculty felt they needed more interaction with their colleagues and more current information.

5. If UW-Stout seeks to foster continuous improvement in the “product” (courses) which it offers to customers (“students”), that process is thwarted by not having a common language to describe the product. There is not a consistent evaluative instrument for students to describe their online class experience. It is important to include criteria that reflect the quality of online teaching in all online faculty and staff performance reviews. Common evaluation instrument questions that include online teaching criteria should be used to assess online instruction across the institution. These questions should be developed and standardized across the University.

6. The University needs to develop and standardize key questions to include in all online faculty and staff performance reviews regarding the delivery of online courses. It is important to implement common end-of-course faculty evaluation questions. Responses to those questions should be accessible in coordinating the University’s distance learning presence. There is tremendous disparity in the comments regarding faculty evaluations. The School of Education should be commended on its faculty evaluations. One instructor stated:

- “In other departments and Colleges, end-of-course evaluations are little more than smile sheets and they don’t go anywhere. Here, the program manager calls you up and talks about individual items ... and whether a given response is meaningful or not.” *[instructor]*

However, many online faculty stated that they are not reviewed, nor does their supervisor access their course. The following instructor comments reflect the general feedback the Committee received.

- “Faculty evaluations come to the department chairs and they can just blow them off. Very few [adjuncts] have really been evaluated. They work for Doug but the department chair is the guy’s evaluator.” *[instructor]*
- “I have worked part-time at Stout for many years and my supervisor has never spoken with me regarding an evaluation. I do receive a “good job” comment every once in a while.” *[instructor]*

7. Implement video technologies for various academic purposes including providing synchronous and archived professional development to faculty (especially adjunct) and staff.

8. Improve the use of the online learning platform by offering faculty more structured D2L training. This would include identifying means by which faculty could use the interactivity tools within D2L in their online classes. Extend the faculty training to include student and staff services/departments who work within the online D2L course framework.

9. Faculty should evaluate course learning outcomes that could better serve students by providing more realistic labs, field interaction, hands-on experiences, and/or authentic assessment.

10. Extended coverage in support offices on evenings and weekends to support online students.
11. The University should discuss and evaluate some of the more traditional views still embraced by departments and Colleges. Student and faculty comments reflect the frustration that distance learning is still not on an equal footing with on-ground by many University staff. Comments included:
  - “Why can’t campus students take online classes without a hassle?” [*student*]
  - “I get grief and asked why do online students wait for the last minute to register?” [*student*]
  - “There is no smooth transition from on-ground to on-line classes.” [*student*]
  - “Administration has never taught online so how can they appreciate the amount of time it takes?” [*instructor*]
  - “Some professors just move classroom classes online and do not get involved in the online environment or technology.” [*student*]
  - “I have no idea where to get tutoring and support and my instructor does not know.” [*student*]
  - “Many services are still geared to traditional support” [*student*]
12. We applaud the recent hiring of an instructional designer to work specifically on online courses. Consider expanding the number of instructional designers and/or develop an instructional design team model to address the backlog of 40 courses. A model commonly used for developing new online courses at other major public universities is either a team approach (instructional designer, creative staff, faculty member) or course development training for the faculty member with release-time or monetary compensation for building the course. UW-Stout is making good initial steps in this area. A few instructor comments:
  - “For new courses, faculty are asked to do so much with very little time. Putting a class online is a huge burden to the faculty. No technology staff to help them. Faculty need help in this area.” [*instructor*]
  - “Stout doesn’t have the money to pay for technical help when building a course—so they [the faculty] take it on the chin and are not always successful.” [*instructor*]
13. Before developing and designing a new on-ground program, Colleges should work with the appropriate University departments to research whether the new program would attract more students if it was initially offered online. These departments should include PARQ, University Marketing, Stout Online, etc.
14. E-textbooks are a good idea for some students, but they are not for all students. Consider providing an option. One size does not always fit all. One student’s comment captures other students’ sentiments.
  - “I have a job where I sit at a computer screen for 8 hours a day. My courses this term have only e-texts. I cannot then sit and look at a computer screen for another 4 hours each night when I get home. My eyes can’t take it.” [*present student*]

15. Educate and train staff and faculty on “Fraud Rings” and the warning signs. The University has legal exposure if it is not pro-active in this area.
16. Continue the emphasis on Web enhancing on-ground courses.
17. It is important to develop a few “model courses” for faculty that exemplify how to use D2L tools.
18. Evaluate the funding for the library as the prices for the subscriptions for mega search engines and other digital resources increase annually. It is important to cover costs of their cutting edge videos and electronic property.
19. New technology is a “cost-of-doing-business expense” for online learning. Resources need to be invested in faculty professional development if programs are to remain viable and flourish long term. Lecture capture and two-way video are not “cutting edge”, anymore; they are every day tools in online learning. The following student and faculty comments capture the essence of the issue.
  - “One writing teacher would post videos to help us out. That was good – it helped visual and auditory learners.” *[recent graduate]*
  - “Would like the content delivery to be more interactive.” *[student]*
  - “We were cutting edge at one time, but now we have not kept up. We need video, we need good lecture capture tools.” *[instructor]*
  - “I think we’ve settled in and not moved forward. We need to continue to bring things forward. For instance two-way video. We need to be able to meet with students through a variety of tools. We need to be able to see their video as well. It is a hot area and we should be doing more” *[instructor]*

## **Standard 5: Infrastructure**

### **5.1 Distance Education Advocacy and Support**

The University of Wisconsin-Stout’s high standards of educational quality, advocacy, and support in its on-ground classroom delivery program are being extended to its distance education programs. The transferring of these quality standards from on-ground classroom settings to its distance education programs has been witnessed in the areas of:

1. Planning and Evaluation
2. Learning Outcomes Assessment
3. Organization and Governance
4. Education Programs
5. Faculty
6. Physical Resources
7. Student Services
8. Library
9. Information Technology
10. Financial Planning and Budgeting

The Certification Team confirmed during its visit that Stout Online provides Instructional Design and media focused technical support to the College of Management online faculty. Distance learning technologies: lecture capture, conferencing, and streaming are provided by

Learning Technology Services. Some courses, whether on-ground or at a distance, utilize these services and technologies.

## 5.2 Distance Education Technology

Members of the Visiting Team toured the University facilities. The technology infrastructure and facilities of the University were excellent. D2L is the University's Learning Management System vendor.

Many distance education students and faculty at the University are well supported with technology tools and software. The IT staff have significant experience in the industry to understand the mission critical nature of the distance education technology infrastructure and student support.

The University supports a Learning and Information Technology (LIT) unit that consists of:

- Enterprise Information Systems
- Learning Technology Services
- Nakatani Teaching and Learning Center
- Telecommunications and Networking

An overview of each department follows.

**Learning and Information Technology (LIT)** at UW-Stout provides services that support the technology infrastructure for distance learning, and utilizes a strategic planning process to prioritize and align services with the needs of the campus. The CIO and three unit directors confer weekly as well as having an annual planning session. In addition, several IT and campus councils provide recommendations and feedback for continuous improvement of services to the LIT management team.

**Enterprise Information Systems (EIS)** provides administrative data and enterprise resource planning (ERP) services including PeopleSoft (Campus Solutions) student information system application development, support and maintenance, data warehousing, and report development; campus website technical support/operation, and the support for servers for the UW-Stout community.

**Learning Technology Services (LTS)** is an instructional technology center focusing on teaching and learning for instructors of the UW-Stout teaching community. LTS partners with faculty to provide expertise, training, and support. They also assist them with incorporating instructional technology into their teaching practice and creating technology-enhanced instructional materials.

The **Telecommunications and Networking (T&N)** department serves UW-Stout's academic community by providing support for campus computers, applications, and services. The ASK5000 Technology Help Desk is a service of T&N that provides phone and walk-up support to faculty, staff, and students. Other services include e-mail, network infrastructure, and telephone service as well as a host of server-based applications.

### **5.3 Instructors/support staff**

Instructor and support staff technology needs are served by Stout Online and the Learning and Information Technology (LIT) unit staff. They assist faculty, staff, and students with account access, and resolve IT related issues regarding on-campus computer systems and equipment. The Stout Online staff works with all academic and administrative units leveraging existing expertise and resources of the University to offer coursework through distance education. The Stout Online staff is responsible for providing supplemental support for the development and delivery of distance education courses and programs.

### **5.4 Learner Support**

Once students are enrolled, the University offers a variety of resources dedicated to ensuring academic success. This is achieved by a variety of academic and support services. The Director of UW-Stout Online and his staff work with the members of all Colleges and departments to insure that the University of Wisconsin-Stout is committed to providing services to distance learners. Students have access to Access Stout (PeopleSoft) to determine pertinent academic requirements and their progress towards completion. Transfer students are provided a transfer equivalency report prior to beginning their course of study at Stout. This outlines how their credits transfer into UW-Stout.

Student orientation to individual programs differs and several undergraduate programs include a 1-credit introductory class.

Instructors are expected to monitor learning within courses. Students have access to program advisors, their program director and student service specialists with Stout Online. Each term, an advisement day is part of the academic calendar.

### **Academic Support**

The Visiting Team had the opportunity to meet with faculty and academic support staff during its visit. In the Visiting Team's judgment, the University recognizes the importance of learner support staff. Individuals hired for learner support positions collaborate to provide distance education students with an environment conducive to academic success. With distance education experience, staff and faculty members are able to anticipate the needs of students, counsel students, and problem solve. At the same time, they exercise creativity and an academic expertise learned in an online environment. In addition, an important quality of all academic support staff members is their ability to collaborate with faculty in ensuring learner success.

### **Library**

One of the most noteworthy indicators of a quality learning environment is its library. From off-campus, students can access the Library's catalog. Elements of library support available to students taking distance education courses include electronic journals, full-text databases, end-user searching, reference assistance and instruction, network access, reciprocal borrowing and interlibrary loan services, cooperative arrangements with other libraries for collection access, cooperative development of databases, and other strategies that emphasize access to resources. Orientation and training on library resources is available to all students. In addition, Library staff provides on-demand assistance in the use of resources for students' projects.

The University is committed to developing library information and resources appropriate to the needs of distance education programs and students. Library staff would also like to work more closely with faculty to ensure that the collections in the library serve the specific needs of distance education students. They desire to offer online core materials that are representative of the subject areas in which the University specializes.

The library staff has a realistic understanding of how the library should support distance education programs. Professional library staff members are well qualified, enthusiastic, service oriented, and dedicated to advancing the Library's contribution to the mission of the University.

Finally, the library understands the importance of student input when assessing its effectiveness. The library would like to collect more information on the effectiveness of services, research assistance, and the adequacy of collections and resources from faculty, staff, and students which will be used to influence library decision making and shape future planning.

### **5.5 Contractor Relations**

The University's online contractors are selected through a collaborative analytical model and proposals are evaluated by technology staff to determine the optimal UW-Stout contractor/product.

The Visiting Team concurs that contracts and the scope of work are reviewed in advance before signing with a vendor. Performance expectations are clear and wording to the effect that vendors abide by the University of Wisconsin-Stout's data security policies and applicable data privacy laws are also included in these contracts.

## **FINDINGS AND AREAS OF RECOMMENDATION**

### **Strengths:**

1. Input from students, faculty, and staff influence the quality of the distance learning environment. This is highly effective in creating a synthesis of learning.
2. The University has made significant investment in establishing Stout Online, upgrading campus facilities, and creating an IT infrastructure.
3. The Library possesses a caring staff, attentive to students' needs in both group and individual work. The Visiting Committee found that:
  - a. The Library Director, Instructional Resources Director, and the Reference/Distance Learning Librarian collaborate with faculty from all academic departments and Colleges, and faculty input drives collection growth and enhancement.
  - b. Many students gain instruction with regard to the library's services and resources in a fashion that is integral and supportive of curricula. Library staff is amenable to tailoring instruction to individual class needs and to students who learn at a distance.
4. The offices dedicated to online student support are critical to the University's fulfilling its mission. Overall, these services are very supportive of students' academic growth and development. Input from the online learning community influences the formation, leadership, and direction of student support activities.



5. Distance education programs use diverse and appropriate technology platforms. A good faith effort is made to update technology platforms.

**Areas of Recommendation:**

1. The creation of quality online courses and programs requires a significant amount of time, resources, training, and instructional design support. Therefore, to support the University's goal of increasing the number of distance education courses and programs, there must be a commensurate increase in the resources devoted to online education. This includes further supporting the faculty creating courses, Stout Online's operations and staffing, and the Colleges and departments responsible for the development and delivery of the online curriculum. In support of the aforementioned, the Certification Team suggests the following:
  - a. Develop a program enrollment growth chart that aligns with an incremental increase of staff and faculty.
  - b. Market and garner stakeholder and community support for the Chancellor's vision of the University of Wisconsin-Stout becoming "*THE*" distinguished branch of the University system for quality and exemplary distance education programs. This goal could be advanced by developing an information module to better introduce University of Wisconsin-Stout non-distance education staff and faculty to the University's distance education mission, policies, and procedures. Ideally, this would include some treatment of online pedagogy to help on-ground faculty understand the distinctive features of online learning and how it can be highly successful.
2. The University should develop and fund a viable IT plan that recognizes both short- and long-term demands of the online program. The plan should recognize the importance of system, platform, and network capacities; accessibility; security and privacy; storage; and reliability specifications.
3. The Library maintains excellent communication with many faculty and students concerning programmatic, teaching, and scholarly needs. Suggestions for improvement include:
  - a. The library should collect and further disaggregate data on distance learning in the areas of the effectiveness of service, research assistance, and adequacy of collections and resources for faculty, staff, and students. This data should be used to influence library decision making and to shape future planning.
  - b. Consider instituting Library support with "live chats" 7 days a week.
  - c. Further identify budget allocations dedicated to the Library which occur in conjunction with growth in program curricula.

4. For the University to identify, prepare, engage, retain, and to graduate students who have selected to fulfill their program of study via distance education, the Visiting Committee recommends the following:

- a. Further utilize social media tools to increase marketing and recruitment.
- b. Continue creating a virtual student environment/center where online students may meet to establish a community of learners (use of wikis, blogs, posting of announcements, etc.). As with on-ground student centers, rules denoting acceptable behaviors must be established, posted, and procedures listed to report inappropriate use.
- c. Launch an online 'student suggestion box' which allows students to submit recommendations at any time.
- d. Form a committee representative of all school organizations, clubs and athletics and plan how to further identify and then incorporate University activities for distance students including a student lounge, broadcasting athletic events, etc.
- e. Consider a distance education alumni tracking system and establish an online alumni association.

5. International distance education students need to receive the same quality of services and support. Therefore, to prepare for further global distance education enrollments, the Visiting Team recommends the following:

- a. Review current operational policies and procedures to ensure that distance learning students receive comparable services as on-ground and in-state online students. (i.e., live advising, help desk services, etc.) or areas of conflict such as immunization policies, etc.
- b. Update student support services to address international students' needs such as translations, TEFL/TESL/TESOL, proctoring, faculty advising, etc.
- c. Establish an international online student community.

6. The University should continue to upgrade its technical infrastructure so it can adequately support the expansion of distance education programs and student enrollment. There were several areas where manual processes, while providing excellent customer service, would impede the ability to scale. Processes and technology could be employed without loss of the human touch.

7. Evaluate facilities and the capacity to accommodate an expansion of distance education and blended distance programs which will potentially increase enrollment (i.e., Stout Online office space, etc.).

8. Mobilization (the use of mobile devices and mobile content of apps and mlearning) is rapidly transforming University campuses. Faculty and students are transforming their mobile devices from mere social tools into effective educational and social tools. Smart phones and tablet devices are quickly becoming students' first choice for accessing the Internet for educational information,

interacting with campus services and staff, as well as serving as their key communications tool. These mobile devices enable students to access information anywhere, at any time: learning is in one's hand. To further take advantage of this educational technology opportunity of mobilization for enhancing teaching and learning, the following recommendations are offered for consideration:

- a. Perform further research to address the impact that mobile devices and associated digital mobile content (apps, social media, eBooks, etc.) are having on teaching, learning, IT operations, student engagement, and interactions with campus services. Survey students and faculty regarding their current use of mobile devices for accessing educational information and campus services.
- b. Establish a mobilization committee to include departments and Colleges and related services in creating a strategic plan for campus implementation and management (IT, bandwidth, security, academic programs access, etc.) of mobile devices.
- c. Consider additional purchases of mobile devices as teaching, research, and workforce tools for faculty and staff to explore the educational benefits of mobile learning anywhere; and at any time. There is a legitimate concern with "wasting" money on new technologies. One way to insure against that is to put promising technologies in the hands of savvy users to let them explore and learn.
- d. Due to continuous changes in mobile technology and the various levels of use of mobile devices by faculty and staff, a regular series of professional development activities should be outlined. This could consist of updates on the impact of mobilization, targeted hands-on training, assessment, and best practices for teaching and learning.
- e. Establish criteria for evaluating the cost and effectiveness of mobile technology. (Examples: Abilene Christian University, (ACU) has developed several evaluation instruments for mobilization. The Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) created mobilization rubrics for evaluating mobile apps and devices for teaching, learning, and workforce development ([www.tbrmobile.org](http://www.tbrmobile.org)).

9. Develop a regular email blast for specific audiences including faculty, staff, and students that in a light, conversational tone highlights a common topic, technology update, or a particular, "Did you know?"

#### **D. Conclusion**

The foregoing recommendations should not overshadow the reality that the University of Wisconsin-Stout and Stout Online have exemplary academic programs. However, implicit in the Team's role is the responsibility to define areas of potential improvement. The areas mentioned above, while important, should not detract from a superior job being performed by a dedicated team of professionals. Indeed, it has been helpful to the Team to gain insights into the many strong areas of a University with which it was not familiar.

More specifically, the United States Distance Learning Association's Quality Standards Certification Team was pleased to review the University of Wisconsin-Stout's distance education programs. The Team was impressed with the Chancellor, administration, faculty, and staff of the

University. It is the Visiting Team's judgment that the current deployment and future expansion plans for distance education programs are valid in establishing priorities and identifying near-term actions and decision points. Indeed, this report can serve as an important catalyst or benchmark for expanding and revitalizing distance education at UW-Stout.

The United States Distance Learning Association is confident that the University of Wisconsin-Stout will be successful in expansion of its distance education programs. USDLA and the Certification Team stand ready to support the University as it translates its plans into the sustainable institutional change and improvement that will prove essential to success.

Finally, the Quality Standards Team was impressed by the initiative and commitment exhibited by each staff member of the University and the Stout Online team. As fellow distance-learning practitioners, we take great pride in the accomplishments of the University and its faculty and staff who serve students at a distance. We believe the University will reflect credit on the United States Distance Learning Association and on its Quality Standards Certification program. Therefore, we are pleased to recommend that the University of Wisconsin-Stout be awarded USDLA Quality Standards Certification.

Well done.

**USDLA Quality Standards Review Team for University of Wisconsin-Stout**

*George Collins*

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George Collins

*Marilyn Gardner*

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Marilyn Gardner, Ph.D., J.D.

*Robbie K. Melton*

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Robbie Melton, Ph.D.

*Janet McMahon*

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Janet McMahon, Ph.D.



## Appendix A

### Quality Standards Compliance Matrix

Standard 1: Provider Pre-requisites

Standard 2: Administration, Leadership and Management

Standard 3: Learner Affairs

Standard 4: Teaching and Learning

Standard 5: Infrastructure

Item	Standard	App <sup>1</sup>	Principle	Discussion	Finding
<b>1</b>	<b>Provider prerequisites</b>				
1.1	The provider adheres to the USDLA/QS Code of Conduct.	A	Commitment to integrity	Actions of the staff reflect a commitment to integrity. Student interviews confirm this.	T
1.2	The provider’s name, or the name under which it does business, is consistent with its purpose and appropriate for its educational programs.	A	Integrity/transparency	The Institution began as Stout Manual Training School in 1891.	T
1.3	The mission of the distance learning program is consistent with the provider’s overall role and mission.	A	Strategic alignment	Distance learning mission is consistent with University mission but needs further definition in University Strategic Plan and with a <i>Distance Education Policy</i> .	S
1.4	An oversight body (e.g., a board of directors) effectively oversees the provider, its policies, and its performance.	A	Accountability	Two oversight bodies.	T
1.5	Notwithstanding the absence of a specific standard, no provider holding USDLA/QS certification shall engage in any practice which USDLA/QS deems to be fraudulent, dishonest, unethical, unsafe, exploitive, irresponsible, deceptive, or inequitable and thus harmful or unfair to those with whom the provider deals.	A	Precautionary “umbrella”	No evidence indicating the provider is anything other than an ethical entity.	T
<b>2</b>	<b>Administration, Leadership, and Management</b>				
<b>2.1</b>	<b>Integrity</b>	The provider shall conduct its activities in accordance with the highest ethical principles. The provider shall be open and honest in its dealings with the public.			
2.1a	The provider’s publications, presentations, advertisements, and statements are accurate and in no way misleading.	A	Truth in advertising	Reviewed many publications produced by the University.	T
2.1b	A non-profit provider must adhere to an explicit policy prohibiting conflicts of interest at all levels.	A	Workplace integrity	Incorporated in the State of Wisconsin and no conflicts of interest.	T
2.1c	Neither administrative nor faculty compensation includes commissions for having recruited students.	A	Clarity of employee purpose	Straight salary compensation.	T
2.1d	Provider seeks to understand and comply with the legal and regulatory requirements of the jurisdiction in which it operates.	A	Proactive compliance	University seeks to comply with all requirements. Good links to policies.	T

Applicability: **A**= Direct application    **B**=Extrapolated application

Finding:    **T**=Target    **S**=Satisfactory    **D**=Deficient    **Y**=Yes    **N**=No

Item	Standard	App <sup>1</sup>	Principle	Discussion	Finding
2.1e	The provider takes a pro-active stance on compliance with the copyright laws.	A	Intellectual property	Part of integrity.	T
2.1f	The provider complies both with spam laws and telemarketing rules.	A	Client privacy, respect	University is protective of email accounts.	T
2.1g	The provider actively fosters integrity in student academic work.	A	Academic integrity	Driven by the academic Colleges/departments	T
2.1h	The provider acknowledges an obligation ... to continue its programs for a time sufficient to allow enrolled students to complete their course of study.	A	Teach-out option	University enables and facilitates the continuity.	T
2.1i	The provider honors its financial commitments and contractual obligations on a timely basis.	A	Financial integrity	Evidence that meets obligations, both internally and externally.	T
2.1j	When disputes arise between the provider and another entity, the provider works to resolve those differences amicably and without taking unfair advantage.	A	Good faith effort	Good university-wide working relationships.	T
<b>2.2</b>	<b>Structure and organization</b>		The provider shall be structured in such a manner that facilitates the effective delivery of education.		
2.2a	An oversight body must collectively possess financial, academic, and managerial knowledge. Individual members need not have all of these characteristics. ....	A	Competent accountability	Extensive university-wide accountability.	T
2.2b	Provider values and strategic objectives are conveyed to and understood by employees and key subcontractors.	A	Team spirit, engagement	Impressive Baldrige Award	T
2.2c	The provider is <u>logically organized</u> to distribute responsibility among positions. The organizational format is consistent with the services offered and the qualifications needed to fulfill the duties of each position. Within reason, an individual may occupy more than one position.	A	Organizational competency	Organizational Chart is consistent with the services offered and the qualifications needed.	T
2.2d	All persons responsible for provider management must be individually qualified by education, experience, and record of conduct to assure effective management, ethical practice, quality services, and a credible course of study.	A	Individual competency	Qualified staff are in place.	T



Item	Standard	App <sup>1</sup>	Principle	Discussion	Finding
2.2e	There is a Chief Executive Officer responsible for overall management. That officer possesses a doctor’s degree or otherwise a degree higher than any offered by the provider anywhere, together with managerial experience appropriate to the level, size, and complexity of the provider. This officer is accountable to an oversight body or corporate owner.	A	Competent leadership	Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Provost and Director of Stout Online guide and support distance education programs.	T
2.2f	There is a Chief Academic Officer for the entire provider who is responsible for the faculty and the academic programs. ....	A	Competent leadership	Excellent academic leadership.	T
2.2g	There is a business officer for the entire provider responsible for financial and support services. ....	A	Competent support	Business office is in support and knowledgeable of distance education programs.	T
<b>2.3</b>	<b>Academic development</b>	The provider’s commitment to student learning is reflected in its academic structure.			
2.3a	Faculty members are sufficiently numerous and so distributed as to give effective instructional and advisory attention to students in all USDLA/QS certified programs offered by the provider.	A	Instructional focus	Class course loads and student:teacher ratios in distance education courses indicate sufficient faculty deployment.	S
2.3b	Faculty members are individually qualified by virtue of their education and experience to give expert instruction or evaluation in their specialties. They have degrees earned from recognized providers.	A	Instructional competence	Faculty members are individually qualified.	T
2.3c	The provider employs, compensates, supervises, and evaluates its faculty systematically and fairly, not arbitrarily.	A	Instructional management	Employs, compensates, supervises, and evaluates faculty fairly. Very good department bylaws.	S
2.3d	The provider has made the continued professional development of its faculty and instructional staff a priority.	A	Staff development	Professional development for faculty and instructional staff is important.	S

<b>2.4</b>	<b>Quality management</b>	The provider is committed to enhancing its educational program through the continuous improvement process.			
2.4a	The provider systematically collects and analyzes relevant observations (i.e., “data”) to guide the continuous improvement process. As an outgrowth of this, a needs assessment is prepared and “lessons learned” are developed. These, in turn, provide a basis to articulate new goals for further improvements.	A	Continuous improvement process	Students are surveyed at various points in their programs. Staff is sensitive to needs of both students and the academic departments.	S
2.4b	Assessments of ... effectiveness includes objective measures such as retention/completion rates, student	A	Robust evaluations	Departments/Colleges track student progress as well as surveying students.	S

	recruitment, or job placements as well as more subjective means such as satisfaction surveys.				
2.4c	The provider's various performance indicators show respectable rates when compared to those of other providers. If a comparison is not feasible, the performance indicators are either at a high level or are trending upward.	A	Benchmarking	Performance indicators are collected and shared.	S
2.4d	Employees and contractors [§ 5.5b] at all levels understand the importance of continuous improvement and are involved in the quality management process.	A	Pervasive improvement	Evidence that quality improvement is an aspect of distance education. However, university-wide strategic objectives need to include distance education and embraced by all departments and Colleges university-wide.	S
<b>2.5</b>	<b>Financial management</b>	The financial resources of the provider are managed to provide a sound educational program.			
2.5a	The provider practices competent financial planning based on complete and accurate records.	A	Fiscal planning	There is competent financial planning.	T
2.5b	The provider has sufficient financial resources to ensure successful operations and to guarantee students a full refund of any unearned tuition.	A	Fiscal responsibility	There are sufficient financial resources.	T
<b>3</b>	<b>Student Affairs</b>				
<b>3.1</b>	<b>Recruitment/admission</b>	Recruitment efforts shall be characterized by integrity and responsibility, focusing on meeting the long-term needs of the prospective student.			
3.1a	The provider offers admission only when the prospective student can reasonably expect to complete a program or degree, or otherwise benefit from the education thus obtained.	A	Constructive enrollments	This is an area of continuous focus and outreach in order to improve retention and graduation rates.	T
3.1b	Prospective students receive a complete description of the provider and its policies, including an estimate of annual or program costs, before being enrolled in a course of study. While not necessarily binding, this material must give a reasonable, good faith summary of the anticipated financial commitment.	A	Transparent financial commitment	University publishes fees.	T
3.1c	For programs that imply preparation for specific occupations, the provider explains the relationship between its curriculum and subsequent qualification for occupational practice including, if applicable, graduates' success rates in licensure or other qualifying examinations.	A	Realistic occupational expectations	Explains relationship between curriculum and subsequent qualification for licensure and occupational practice.	T
3.1d	Claims made for the purpose of attracting prospective students are documented with evidence available	A	Credible marketing	Claims made for the purpose of attracting prospective students are documented.	Y

	for inspection upon request.				
3.1e	Schools/Colleges which offer degree or diploma programs award credit that is commensurate to the work accomplished by their students.	A	Comparable academic credit	Credit is commensurate to the work.	Y
3.1f	Schools/Colleges offering degree programs award credit toward degrees by the assent of qualified faculty and/or examiners.	A	Academic endorsement	Qualified faculty and/or examiners.	Y
3.1g	A total of no more than one year (or 25%, whichever is less) of an academic program can be completed using any combination of advanced placement (AP), challenge exams, learning validated by a portfolio, or prior experience.	A	Credible course of instruction	No more than one year (or 25%, whichever is less) of an academic program can be completed using any combination of advanced placement.	NA
3.1h	Academic requirements that are satisfied by the student's submission of a portfolio conform to the intent of the credit evaluation guide of the American Council on Education (or similar recognized criterion).	A	Credible course of study	Student portfolios conform.	Y
3.1i	In a distinct area of its catalog with a heading akin to "transfer of credit to other providers," the provider includes notice that "transfer of credit is always at the discretion of the receiving provider, generally depends on comparability of curricula, and may depend on comparability of accreditation."	A	Transferability expectations	Transfer of credit is included in materials that are distributed.	Y
3.1j	Prior to making an enrollment commitment, the prospective student is apprised of any access to technologies that is required for full participation in the program.	A	Student's technology expectations	Technology expectations are part of qualifying prospective distance education students but needs improvement.	Y
3.1k	Prior to making an enrollment commitment, the prospective student is apprised of any technical competencies that are required for full participation in the program.	A	Student's technical aptitude	Technical aptitude part of qualifying prospective distance education students but needs improvement.	Y
<b>3.2</b>	<b>Guidance and counseling</b>		A provider is uniquely positioned to offer the information and insights which its students need for making sound educational choices. Thus, the guidance and counseling function is a key point of interface between the provider and its students.		
3.2a	Before enrolling in the program, students are apprised of the mechanics of the program to determine if they have the means and commitment to learn at a distance.	A	Student's Distance Education compatibility	Student's Distance Education compatibility part of qualifying prospective students.	S
3.2b	The provider makes an initial student assessment that is sufficiently thorough to provide a basis for planning an individual course of study.	A	Suitable course of study	There is an initial student assessment.	S

3.2c	Impartial guidance enables students to make informed choices about the programs best suited to them. In other words, academic counseling is distinct from marketing.	A	Integrity in counseling process	Academic counseling is distinct from marketing.	Y
3.2d	Each student is assigned a qualified academic advisor to assist in planning, course selection, learning methods, and general adjustment.	A	Availability of adviser	Each student has an advisor.	Y
3.2e	The provider provides career guidance to the extent that the curriculum is related to a prospective occupation or profession.	A	Career guidance	Students receive career guidance.	Y
<b>3.3</b>	<b>Orientation</b>	An orientation shall enable students to understand the obligations and opportunities of their respective programs and to quickly become productive in their courses of study.			
3.3a	An orientation shall enable students to understand the obligations and opportunities of their respective programs and to quickly become productive in their courses of study.	A	Purposeful orientation	Student orientation for learners at a distance needs improvement. Students should be required to pass orientation module before taking classes.	D
3.3b	Each student receives a handbook, in printed or electronic form, that describes relevant services, policies, and regulations.	A	Structured orientation	Printed materials are available online.	S
<b>3.4</b>	<b>Fees and refunds</b>	The provider shall maintain fee and refund policies that are fair, uniformly administered, accessible, and readily understood.			
3.4a	Provider's fee and refund policies are clearly explained in the catalog as well as in any contract made with the student.	A	Published fee policy	Fee and refund policies are clearly explained	Y
3.4b	Students receive a complete schedule of fees with pertinent explanatory material before they are officially enrolled.	A	Fees fully disclosed	Fee disclosures are included in pre-enrollment materials sent to students and students must acknowledge receipt.	Y
3.4c	Once fees are set, the provider maintains rates for the balance of the defined enrollment period.	A	Stability in fees	University maintains tuition rates for balance of enrollment.	Y
3.4d	The provider's schedule of fees is sufficiently stable to permit current students to anticipate future costs and thus continue in the program.	C	Predictable expenses	Schedule of fees is sufficiently stable.	Y
<b>3.5</b>	<b>Records and transcripts</b>	Whether records are held in physical or electronic form, the provider shall safeguard the integrity and confidentiality of its student records.			
3.5a	The provider keeps safe, accurate records for all students. There is at all times complete duplicate transcript information kept in a location away from the original transcripts, such that originals and duplicates are not reasonably exposed to the risk of simultaneous damage or destruction.	A	Preservation of records	University keeps safe, accurate records for all students.	T
3.5b	The provider maintains for every past and present student, and issues at the request of any student who is not	A	Availability of transcripts	University maintains records for every past and present student.	Y

	delinquent in fee payment, a current transcript of credits and the degrees they have been awarded.				
3.5c	The student transcript (or an accompanying document) identifies the provider and explains its academic calendar, length of term, academic credit structure, and grading system.	A	Transcript comparability criteria	Transcript identifies the provider and academic details.	Y
3.5d	The student transcript identifies the student and shows relevant prior degrees earned, details of any credit transferred (or otherwise awarded upon entry), and periods of enrollment.	A	Student educational history	Student transcript shows relevant prior degrees earned and student information.	Y
3.5e	The student transcript includes each course completed, the number of credits earned, and the grade received.	A	Transcript detail	Transcripts include each course completed.	Y
3.5f	Transcripts and archival copies of transcripts are maintained in perpetuity by the provider.	A	Transcript perpetuity	Transcripts and archival copies are maintained.	Y
3.5g	The provider maintains [§3.5h] records documenting significant elements of its relationship with each student: financial transactions and accounts, admission qualifications, validation of advanced standing, instructor course records as posted to transcripts, and status changes due to unsatisfactory performance or conduct.	A	Comprehensive student records	University maintains records documenting significant elements of its relationship with each student.	Y
3.5h	Supporting records [§3.5g] are kept safe for a period of at least five years after a student has discontinued enrollment.	A	Longevity of records	Supporting records are kept safe.	Y
3.5i	Faculty-prepared evidences of expectation (e.g., course syllabi or sample exams) and performance (e.g., graded work) are retained for each academic course for at least one year.	A	Course documentation maintained	Faculty-prepared evidences of student expectations and performance are retained.	Y
<b>3.6</b>	<b>Grievances</b>	The provider shall have effective structures in place for dealing with appeals and complaints in a reasonable and unbiased manner			
3.6a	The provider is attentive to grievances, responds to them on a timely basis, and resolves them equitably.	A	Responsive to complaints	University is attentive to grievances. Very thorough process and well documented.	T
3.6b	Complaint files are periodically analyzed to determine areas with the potential to benefit from systematic (i.e., “continuous”) improvement. This review of case files in order to discern such patterns or repetitions is part of the provider’s quality management program.	A	A tool for continuous improvement	Complaint files are periodically analyzed.	T

3.6c	Students are informed of the grievance/complaint/appeal procedure upon enrollment. These procedures are periodically reiterated.	A	Grievance procedure publicized	Grievance procedures periodically reiterated.	Y
3.6d	The provider retains a record of grievances and their disposition for a minimum of 36 months after closure.	A	Grievances are recorded	University retains a record of grievances. They use as tools for improvement.	Y
<b>4</b>	<b>Teaching and Learning</b>				
<b>4.1</b>	<b>Curriculum</b>		The provider's curriculum and its components are organized in a manner that offers students a logical, orderly, and consistent progression.		
4.1a	The curriculum has a structure that reflects faculty participation in the overall learning objectives in an academic field as well as the learning in an individual class.	A	Collegiality and relevance	Good faculty participation in the overall learning objectives.	T
4.1b	In the course of their enrollment, students acquire new knowledge and skills while increasing their level of understanding. The knowledge thus gained is appropriate to the level of credit being awarded by the provider.	A	Knowledge and understanding	Students acquire new knowledge and skills.	T
4.1c	Expectations for student performance increase as the student continues in a course of study. Higher degrees, if awarded, must represent an increase in the difficulty, not simply an accumulation or increase in the quantity of student work.	A	Incremental effort/progress	There are expectations for student performance increase. Very good "Meaning of a Baccalaureate."	T
4.1d	Distance learning students have access to the requisite courses for progressing towards their goals or, if not, have been clearly notified of this limitation prior to their enrollment.	A	Course availability	Distance education students know the courses required for each program and work with the academic departments to insure that they will be available. Good matrix on prerequisite courses.	S
<b>4.2</b>	<b>Course structure and instruction</b>		Courses offered by the provider to distance learning students are worthy in content and coherent in design.		
4.2a	The faculty has articulated intended student competencies for a given course. Courses are designed to achieve stated learning objectives.	A	Purposeful design	Faculty articulate intended student competencies. Quality of distance learning syllabi varies by college.	S
4.2b	The importance of interaction between the instructor (or surrogate) and the students at a distance is both recognized and facilitated by the course design and the technical infrastructure.	A	Interactive opportunities	Importance of interaction between the instructor and the students at a distance varies by program and College.	S
4.2c	Distance-learning classes meet the same provider standards as traditional classes. Thus, students experience a consistent level of quality and a coherent frame of reference regardless of how they are enrolled.	A	DL equivalence	Distance education classes meet the same University standards as traditional classes.	Y
4.2d	Courses and, as appropriate, their learning management systems, are designed with a consistent structure,	A	Consistent approach	Courses and their learning management systems are designed with a consistent structure.	Y

	readily recognized by students with varied abilities.				
4.2e	Guidelines are used to reference minimum standards for the development, design, and delivery of courses.	A	Standards of development	Guidelines are used to reference minimum standards.	Y
4.2f	Teachers use a syllabus (or similar instrument) to convey to students the learning objectives, strategies, and outcomes for each course and the means by which learning is to be scored or measured.	A	Defined course expectations	Faculty use a syllabus to convey to students the learning objectives, but quality varies by program and College. Caution needed for adjunct instructors hired on short notice.	Y
4.2g	In each course, the students have access to print or electronic learning resources.	A	Breadth of resources	Students have access to print/electronic learning resources.	Y
4.2h	Tests and assignments, once graded, are made available to students on a timely basis.	A	Timely feedback	Tests and assignments made available to students on a timely basis.	Y
4.2i	Tests and written assignments are scored in a manner that helps students to learn from the experience and advance in the course.	A	Coherent feedback	Tests and written assignments are scored to help students to learn.	Y
4.2j	Feedback to students is provided in a manner that is timely, constructive, and non-threatening.	A	Constructive feedback	Feedback is provided in a manner that is timely, constructive, and non-threatening.	Y
4.2k	The curriculum offers varied strategies of inclusion so that students of differing abilities or styles of learning may interact with one another or their instructor.	A	Inclusive methodologies	Curriculum and syllabi in some programs and Colleges could offer varied strategies of inclusion and engagement including interactive activities and inclusive methodologies for distance education learners. The School of Education excels.	N
4.2l	Library resources are current, well distributed among fields in which the provider offers instruction, cataloged, logically organized, and readily accessed.	A	Adequate student reference	Library resources are current, well distributed among fields.	Y
4.2m	Library resources are accessible to distance-learning students. Distance-learning students have access to the library and to library help at times which are generally workable for their schedules.	A	DL library accessible	Distance education students have access to the library and to library help.	Y
<b>4.3</b>	<b>Student evaluation</b>		Balanced assessment of student performance is an integral part of every course.		
4.3a	Assessment is used to enhance the prospects of each student in a course. Assessment tools should be varied – for instance exams, quizzes, writing assignments, lab reports, projects, performance-based assignments, or personal interviews – and focused on course objectives [see §4.2a]. ....	A	Assessments to advance learning	Assessment is used to enhance the prospects of each student in a course.	S
4.3b	An assessment is made at the end of a	A	Accountability for	Assessments are made at the end of	S

	class term which measures what the student has learned against the specific objectives [§4.2a] of a course or program. .... Appropriate measures are taken to ensure integrity of the instrument.		learning	a class term which measures what the student has learned against the specific objectives.	
4.3c	Personal identification and personal information is safeguarded when the results of student assessments are disseminated.	A	Privacy respected	Personal identification and personal information are safeguarded.	Y
4.3d	Grading and appeal procedures are fair, accurate, and equitably administered.	A	Impartial assessment	Grading and appeal procedures are fair.	Y
4.3e	Improving the efficacy of student assessments is sufficiently important to the school that the topic is regularly emphasized with the faculty.	A	Effective evaluations	Improving the efficacy of student assessments is important to the University.	Y
<b>4.4</b>	<b>Program assessment</b>		An assessment process is used to validate program standards and improve teaching and learning.		
4.4a	The provider has a plan for and regularly evaluates its educational effectiveness. In doing so, it seeks input from a cross section of stakeholders.	A	Systematic self-examination	University reviews the effectiveness of Distance Education programs, but this is an area in need of improvement.	S
4.4b	Program assessment includes an appraisal of both curriculum and instruction.	A	Comprehensive review	Assessment includes an appraisal of both curriculum and instruction, but this is an area in need of improvement.	Y
4.4c	Program assessment routinely examines issues associated with student attrition, including the reasons for withdrawal.	A	Inclusive review	Assessment examines issues associated with student attrition, but this is an area in need of improvement.	Y
4.4d	Program assessment includes a review of how students perform after program completion or graduation. This would include, as appropriate, the results from licensing or certification examinations and interviews with employers.	A	Long-term results	There is a review of how students perform after program completion or graduation.	Y
4.4e	Various tools (e.g., personal observation, student surveys, analysis of student performance data, job placement data) are used to assess areas of provider strength and weakness.	A	Robust evaluation	Various tools are used to assess areas of provider strength and weakness.	Y

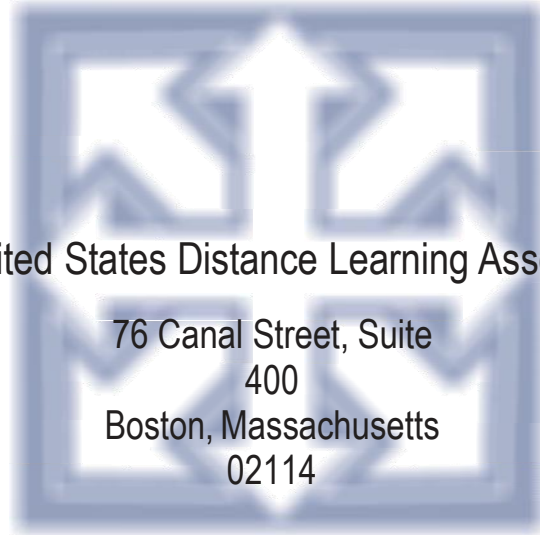
<b>5</b>	<b>Infrastructure</b>				
<b>5.1</b>	<b>Distance learning advocacy and support</b>		The provider demonstrates a commitment to the long-term success of distance learning by assigning sufficient resources.		
5.1a	The provider provides sufficient staff (e.g., faculty, instructional staff, technicians) to support its distance learning curriculum and operations.	S	Sufficiency of Distance Education faculty and staff	Distance education staffing appears stretched especially in the area instructional design and IT support.	N



5.1b	The provider provides sufficient physical resources (e.g., technology, network infrastructure, physical plant) to sustain its distance learning operations.	A	Sufficiency of DE tools	University provides sufficient physical resources.	Y
5.1c	Faculty and instructional staff have sufficient resources – academic resources, budget, copyright material, prep time – to develop courses in an efficient manner without undue stress.	A	Sufficiency of Distance Learning resources	Sufficient faculty resources for distance learning courses in cases of unexpected enrollment.	Y
<b>5.2</b>	<b>Distance learning technology</b>		The provider maintains a reliable technology platform for its distance learning.		
5.2a	The distance learning infrastructure is a functionally planned and coherently managed system.	A	Unified technical platform	Distance education infrastructure is functionally planned.	S
5.2b	Technology deployments attempt to mitigate disruptions (e.g., assimilation, downtime, expense) to students and faculty.	A	Minimally disruptive upgrades	Technology deployments attempt to mitigate disruptions.	Y
5.2c	Appropriate electronic security measures are in place to ensure the availability, integrity, and validity of information.	A	Systematic security	There are appropriate electronic security measures.	Y
<b>5.3</b>	<b>Faculty/staff support</b>		Faculty and instructional staff receive technical, design, and production support in their distance learning responsibilities. This includes initial training in the technology. Operational support continues throughout the class cycle.		
5.3a	A technical help desk is responsive to the faculty and instructional staff .	A	Faculty technical help	Technical help desk is responsive, but often limited to equipment distributed in on-ground undergraduate programs.	S
5.3b	If needed, the provider provides managers with the preparation needed to become conversant in distance learning technology and instructional design.	A	Management understands Distance Learning	Many distance learning staff have hands-on experience in distance education and evidence a good understanding of the medium.	Y
5.3c	The provider provides faculty and instructional staff with appropriate training in facilitating and managing student interaction.	A	Interactivity tools	The Stout Online administration and staff have worked to influence and upgrade course development to this end, but faculty need more training and support.	Y
5.3d	The information needs of faculty and instructional staff are recognized. Performance data is available and is used to advance student learning opportunities.	A	Staff data tools	The information needs of faculty and instructional staff are recognized.	Y
<b>5.4</b>	<b>Student support</b>		Service and assistance is readily available to distance-learning students for the duration of their enrollment.		
5.4a	Provider recognizes responsibility to insure that students understand their courses of study and helps them work productively in that framework.	A	Productively engage students	The Stout Online administration and staff work in conjunction with Colleges and academic departments.	S
5.4b	The provider tracks individual student performance. Students experiencing difficulty in their programs (e.g.,	A	Early warning of student problems	The University tracks individual student performance.	T

	attendance, academic performance) are identified and counseled on a timely basis.				
5.4c	Students must apply effort to their studies, complete academic assignments, and demonstrate appropriate learning in order to progress.	A	Credible program; no free rides	Students must apply effort to their studies to progress.	Y
5.4d	A technical help desk is responsive to distance learning students.	A	Student technical help	Technical help desk is responsive.	S
5.4e	The provider provides students with such services as are necessary for success in their chosen programs.	A	Requisite student services	Departments/Colleges provide students with appropriate services.	Y
5.4f	Such educational services as are available to the students enrolled on a main campus are readily accessible to distance-learning students in parallel programs.	A	Parity with traditional students	The Stout Online administration and staff have taken the initiative to coordinate broad support for distance education students.	Y
5.4g	Distance learning students are regularly/routinely apprised of the availability and accessibility of services.	A	Students aware of services	Services are a component of Stout Online and individual departments and Colleges.	Y
5.4h	Distance learning students are taught to independently access material from sources such as books, periodicals, online databases, interlibrary loans, government archives, news services, and so forth.	A	Academic self-reliance	The Stout Online administration and staff of Colleges and departments have collaborated with the Library to accomplish this goal.	Y
<b>5.5</b>	<b>Contractor relations</b>		The functions of third-party contractors are seamlessly integrated with those of the provider. The provider ensures that its contractors fully comply with the quality standards of the program.		
5.5a	Contractors undergo due diligence prior to selection. The relationship is defined by a written agreement that formalizes the relationship.	A	Systematic vendor selection	UW-Stout has 3 <sup>rd</sup> party contracts and they meet this standard.	S
5.5b	Contractors recognized as providing important components. Their responsibilities are integrated into the distance learning program. Third-parties understand that USDLA/QS standards affect their operations.	A	Seamless integration of vendors	UW-Stout has 3 <sup>rd</sup> party contracts and they meet this standard.	S
5.5c	Clear lines of authority and responsibility have been established between the provider and the contractors who have contact with students.	A	Defined roles and relationships	UW-Stout has 3 <sup>rd</sup> party contracts and they meet this standard.	S
5.5d	Neither contractors nor vendors assess fees on students unless those charges were clearly explained to the students upon enrollment or prior to incurring the obligation.	A	Hidden charges	UW-Stout has 3 <sup>rd</sup> party contracts and they meet this standard.	Y
5.5e	Contractors respect privacy of students and hold student data, including email addresses, in strict confidence.	A	Privacy rights acknowledged	UW-Stout has 3 <sup>rd</sup> party contracts and they meet this standard.	Y

5.5f	Contractors do not presume to solicit business from students without the permission of the provider and an opt-in from the student.	A	Solicitation proscribed	UW-Stout has 3 <sup>rd</sup> party contracts and they meet this standard.	Y
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The United States Distance Learning Association

76 Canal Street, Suite  
400  
Boston, Massachusetts  
02114

Tel:  
800.275.5162

The **USDLA Quality Standards** symbol certifies that an institution adheres to recognized standards of quality and performance, is responsive to its constituencies, and is committed to excellence in all aspects of its distance learning.

