



A Plan for the Next Stage of E-Learning at Ferris

Submitted by

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A Plan for E-Learning at Ferris

Submitted by the E-Learning Management Advisory Team (E-MAT) – May 2011

Scope of Plan

During fall 2010, Provost and VPAA Fritz Erickson met with the E-MAT group to outline his expectations for the development of a comprehensive plan for online learning at Ferris. Because E-MAT has been studying online for the past 3 years and is already immersed in analyzing data associated with online offerings, including recommendations concerning policies and directions, we willingly accepted this assignment. Integral to our approach was creating an additional opportunity for the entire university community to offer their observations, because online has surfaced as an area of expressed concern from varied sectors on campus. Although a concurrent review of the Course Management System (CMS) is underway, E-MAT did not assume responsibility for recommending the CMS that Ferris should adopt. However, E-MAT did review and endorse the recommendation from the FerrisConnect Advisory Board (FAB) and Information Technology Services (ITS). E-MAT is not responsible for academic technology, having deferred that role to the FerrisConnect Advisory Board (FAB), which works collaboratively with ITS. E-MAT acknowledges, however, the critical importance of developing a comprehensive academic technology plan for the university, which could reasonably be a next area of focus.

The research that led to these recommendations did not address “organization,” as E-MAT understood that issue would be incorporated into the ongoing academic core review. Nevertheless, we do make some suggestions about organizational needs in the section below called Administration and Planning.

The plan is primarily focused on new directions, support requirements, and policy needs. It does not incorporate most ongoing operations associated with support for online learning that exist in the Colleges, Academic Affairs, the Faculty Center, and Information Technology Services – among other areas on campus.

Goals to Be Realized by This Plan:

1. Enhance the quality of the online learning services, programs, and courses at Ferris
2. Create a more effective infrastructure for support of high-quality online learning
3. Position the University for its future in online learning
4. Improve the efficiency of both the delivery and support of e-learning at Ferris

Sources of Information for the Plan:

Both faculty and student surveys were conducted during the spring semester of 2011, and E-MAT members participated in multiple meetings to analyze the survey results and consider recommendations. A total of 177 Ferris faculty who had FerrisConnect courses in the spring semester of 2011 responded to the survey, which was sent to 473, a 37% response rate. It is important to note that not all faculty respondents teach fully online courses, as FerrisConnect is also utilized for blended and web-enhanced sections. A total of 353 students enrolled in fall 2010 online sections responded to the student survey, from a total of 2675 invitations sent (a duplicated head count), for a return of approximately 13%. E-MAT examined additional reports, including enrollment reports and grading and withdrawal reports that have been produced, reviewed, and disseminated to colleges every semester for more than two years.

From January 19 through February 23, E-MAT hosted a series of 10 small-group meetings on the topic categories listed below (student capabilities and responsibilities, technology support, etc.), followed on March 16, 2011, by a large-group meeting, called “Big Tent 2.0,” where all interested were invited to discuss the preliminary recommendations that emerged from the focus groups and the surveys. See the complete schedule and some of the reports here: <http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/administration/academicaffairs/online/>

Complete results of the faculty survey will be found here: <http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/administration/academicaffairs/online/faculty-survey.pdf> The faculty survey results from 2010 are also available on the Online Learning page: <http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/administration/academicaffairs/online/>

The student survey is available from the Office of Academic Affairs.

Review and discussion of the Plan is on the SPARC agenda for the January, February and part of March 2012 meetings.

Recommended Steps in the Review of This Plan

This plan will first be reviewed by the Provost, with the stipulation that some of its recommendations, such as the federal compliance items and the development of the faculty and the student assessments, should be addressed immediately. E-MAT suggests that it then be presented to the following University stakeholders:

1. Deans’ Council – at a June meeting
2. Academic Leadership Council – at a July meeting
3. Senate –at its August retreat
4. SPARC – at its July retreat
5. The entire University community—through University-wide Notices in mid-September

Incorporating stakeholders’ comments into the plan, E-MAT will then make final revisions by mid-October. Finally, the Provost will authorize implementation of the plan and allocate the required budget by November 1.

Executive Summary of the Plan for Online Learning

This plan categorizes e-learning at Ferris into the following five areas and makes 11 recommendations related to these categories.

Student Capabilities and Responsibilities

Recommendation 1: Develop and implement a system whereby each student who registers for a fully online course has demonstrated minimum proficiency in skills required for successful online learning.

Faculty Capabilities and Responsibilities

Recommendation 2: Advance and support faculty effectiveness and instructional quality in online learning.

Recommendation 3: Evaluate the quality of online instruction and develop strategies for continual improvement and enhanced student learning.

Recommendation 4: Create mechanisms for department/college/university-wide collaboration to promote best practices in online learning.

Course/Program Quality Considerations

Recommendation 5: Develop and implement a system of review for course and program quality.

Technology Support

Recommendation 6: Increase the ongoing quality and amount of support for students, faculty, and staff involved with online learning and technology use in instruction.

Recommendation 7: Enhance communications with students, faculty, and staff about the availability of TAC and IT support services.

Recommendation 8: Promote the ongoing exploration of, and recommend the use of new and existing academic technology.

Planning and Administration

Recommendation 9: Develop an administrative structure that encourages quality and viability of online learning at Ferris.

Recommendation 10: Create a financial model that is sustainable and aligns with the university's strategic plan.

Recommendation 11: Assure compliance with applicable state and federal compliance guidelines and assure integrity of online systems.

An In-Depth Look at the Plan's Eleven Recommendations

E-MAT makes eleven recommendations for e-learning at Ferris. In this section, each of these recommendations is explained in detail. Objectives are stated, implementation issues, including timelines, are discussed; required resources are stated, and responsibility for oversight is assigned.

Area: Student Capabilities and Responsibilities

Recommendation 1: Develop and implement a system whereby each student who registers for a fully online course has demonstrated minimum proficiency in skills required for successful online learning.

Objectives or implementation considerations in support of the recommendation:

- a. A simple online pre-assessment that will not require more than 15-25 minutes to complete will be developed. Examples of tasks include submitting assignment, attaching documents, contributing to discussion threads, and saving documents in varied formats. Commercial options will be explored.
- b. The online pre-assessment will be available on the Ferris online website, so students are able to complete the assessment in advance and at a distance.
- c. Testing will be completed through multiple channels, including FSUS courses and the Institutional Research Office.
- d. A field will be created in Banner for making note of the student's having successfully completed the pre-assessment. Students will need to take the assessment only one time. This field must be checked before a student may enroll in a V course.
- e. Any skills required for courses or programs beyond those basic skills tested on the online pre-assessment will be the responsibility of the program or course to incorporate appropriately. Faculty are encouraged to build these into the first days of class.
- f. Training modules for students used by faculty, for those willing to share, will be made available on the Ferris online learning site for use by others.
- g. Mechanisms for students to acquire the skills assessed in item 1 above will be provided, in efficient and effective ways, including face-to-face, blended, and online options. Students will be able to access training from online webpage.
- h. Assessments will be required for **all** students new to Ferris effective fall 2012. However, individual faculty and program personnel are encouraged to have students complete the assessments earlier, according to recommendations within this document.
- i. Beginning fall 2012, all FSUS sections will incorporate the online pre-assessment and the related learning activities as supplemental activities. These may be course assignments that students complete outside of class and do not require face-to-face time. These may also be referrals to workshops scheduled for assisting students to acquire and/or demonstrate their skills.
- j. Because transfer students do not complete FSUS sections, they will need to receive separate e-mails indicating the need to complete the online pre-assessment prior to enrolling in any V-coded course.
- k. Pre-assessments and learning opportunities will be offered at no cost to students (beyond the additional fee already paid for online credits)

Timeline: Begin June 2011 to develop/acquire test, develop procedures, and pilot. Begin pre-assessments in Fall 2011 with full implementation for Fall 2012 enrollments.

Resources Required: Clerical or Administrative Support Personnel time for reviewing results, entering Banner designations, communicating expectations, etc. Estimated time: 20-30 hours per week at beginning and end of semesters, and 4-6 hours per week at other times.

Responsibility: CPTS working with faculty task group and Student Services for Banner implementation and enrollment holds.

Note: Students who have not completed the assessment should not be held up from registering until July 2012, as the first year will be used to get the testing/recording system operating. The requirement will not exist until Summer 2012 to enable test of system and catch-up of backlog students.

Area: Faculty Capabilities and Responsibilities

Recommendation 2: Advance and support faculty effectiveness and instructional quality in online learning.

Objectives or implementation considerations in support of the recommendation:

- a. Develop a “Faculty Toolkit” where faculty have access to resources, including assignments, rubrics, etc.
- b. Add a full-time instructional designer with primary responsibility for working with online courses.
- c. Add additional instructional technology capability to support faculty’s and staff’s effort to improve online instruction. The specific priority needs (such as for media development, design, assessment, course building, etc.) need to be determined.
- d. Require each online faculty member to attend one of three annual training seminars focused on best practices, pedagogy, new tools, among other possible relevant topics. Options will exist for online and virtual participation. Alternate: Seek a system to ensure all faculty members attend quality-enhancing training seminars focused on online best practices, pedagogy, new tools, among other possible relevant topics. Options will exist for online and virtual participation. – ST
- e. Provide additional workshop opportunities – online, blended, and face-to-face – for individuals to develop the required skills.
- f. For faculty who are developing and delivering online courses, provide adequate support with the expertise they require, which may include student assistance, media production, instructional design, etc.
- g. Assure that department heads and chairs (a) know what constitutes good online practices and (b) support faculty in their area to access resources to deliver quality courses. To that end, one strategy will be an annual workshop for the Academic Leadership Council on evaluating quality in online instruction.
- h. Encourage exploration of use of peer-, publisher-, or vendor-created e-learning tools that may complement courses and meet student and faculty needs, rather than building similar course components (such as quizzes, assignments, etc.) independently.
- i. Promote faculty in multi-section areas to collaborate.
- j. Make quality online course models available for faculty and staff to review.
- k. It is important to note that faculty should NOT be required to teach online; it is a voluntary assignment. In order to best insure high-quality course offerings, faculty who teach online must agree to meet certain requirements not imposed on face-to-face faculty.

Timeline: Begin July 2012 with a three-year phased-in approach on faculty demonstration of online teaching capabilities and course review.

Resources: Greater number of quality course peer reviewers, trained department heads, and time and stipends for reviewers.

Responsibility: Academic Affairs

Notes:

Many more people are needed to support individuals and small groups in expanded use of technologies, such as podcasts, Flash, itunes, etc. Consideration must be given to a more proactive approach to academic technology.

Promote the Faculty Toolkit in varied ways, including the Academic Affairs newsletter, syllabi attachments for online courses, and in local communications vehicles. So many great ideas are available for faculty that it can be overwhelming if they're not presented in an organized, systematic way, and at a time when they're open to them—such as just before they prepare/upload their fall/spring classes.

First consideration should be given to utilizing an existing certification program, which will require a small group to evaluate the options. A minimum of 20 percent of the current faculty should be scheduled in each semester, resulting in all having completed a cycle within about 6 semesters.

Some of these objectives may be incorporated into new faculty training programs. It is critical that these be offered at the colleges and not only in the Center.

College leadership and qualified peer reviewers will be integrally involved in advancing the quality with overall documentation maintained in a central office.

Twenty percent of courses will be identified each year for peer reviews with trained quality course reviewers, according to college-level plans. A significant focus of this review will be on adherence to federal guidelines to ensure compliance with documenting online attendance. Colleges will develop the review schedule, which may include consideration of enrollments or recency of program reviews. Other options may include reviewing courses as part of program review, tenure review, or post-tenure review. Aside from compliance issues, incorporated into the review are instructional design, use of instructional technology, and course completion rates.

Colleges or departments are encouraged to convene online teaching and learning committees for this purpose and/or colleges/departments could be encouraged to have regular meetings of online faculty, as we now have college and department meetings.

Recommendation 3: Evaluate the quality of online instruction and develop strategies for continual improvement and enhanced student learning.

Objectives and Implementation Considerations

- a. Faculty must demonstrate their competency in online teaching pedagogy and in use of technologies
- b. Develop an instructional rating form/system that adequately assesses students' perception of course and instructor quality and enables course/program improvement. Form will be developed in two parts: one part for faculty only and their improvement and one for overall course/program administrative oversight.
- c. Faculty who teach at least one online course each semester must include at least one online course among those evaluated each year.
- d. Consistent with the Ferris values of excellence and learning, continuous improvement is expected in all areas of operations. Faculty teaching online (as well as in blended and face-to-face formats) are expected to engage in ongoing review and improvement of their courses through periodic formal and informal reviews to identify best practices and recommend improvements
- e. Align expectations for student learning outcomes and quality instruction across delivery modes – online and face-to-face and benchmark across delivery types. Outcomes must be the same for online and f2f, though assessment methods may differ
- f. Assure that FerrisConnect courses have minimum basic quality attributes – elements from the adopted e-quality framework to be adopted.

Recommendation 4: Create mechanisms for department/college/university-wide collaboration to promote best practices in online learning.

Objectives and Implementation Considerations:

- a. Faculty teaching the same course numbers are encouraged to work collaboratively to improve courses and to explore methods such as an “all star” course where best parts are brought together to build a quality course, etc.
- b. Engage faculty and others in greater collaboration throughout the university regarding incorporation of effective online strategies, including sharing syllabi, resources, etc.
- c. Encourage deans and department heads to regularly provide five to ten minutes for faculty to share teaching practices in monthly meetings.
- d. Provide support to “user groups” or “teaching/learning committees” – such as resources, food, etc., to encourage their success.

Course/Program Quality Considerations

Recommendation 5: Develop and implement a system of review for course and program quality.

Objectives and Implementation Considerations

- a. Adopt the e-learning model researched by the FCTL and in use at Florida State College, as adapted for Ferris by the Best Practices team, for the Ferris online course development.
- b. Develop peer reviewers for courses to be reviewed at college and program levels.
- c. Evaluate comparative course success based upon the students’ comparative performance on course learning outcomes and not upon the delivery strategy. Special approvals are not required for varied delivery strategies. The course information approved through UCC and the Office of Academic Affairs applies to all delivery modes.
- d. Charge assessment committees in the colleges with reviewing the comparative outcomes success of all delivery strategies. Courses that are not achieving desired outcomes must be reviewed with a goal of improving results.
- e. Program coordinators and department heads are responsible for providing at least annual reports of the comparative learning outcomes for courses offered online by reporting the results of their analyses in the TracDat system.
- f. Continuously evaluate which courses and programs are appropriately delivered via online and monitor student demand for varied delivery options.
- g. Work with faculty on improvement strategies for any online courses that do not have at least 80% of those enrolled on count day successfully completing with a 2.0 or higher.
- h. Review online courses to ensure alignment with U.S. Department of Education requirements for verification of student participation and with adopted FSU standards for online learning.

Resources: Travel, training, time, and stipends or release.

Timeline: Adopt system in fall 2011; build model in spring 2012; and implement with phased-in approach in fall 2012.

Responsibility: FCTL and Academic Affairs

Notes:

Ongoing evaluation of the comparative results – the only true measure of course and program effectiveness – is an integral responsibility of all academic leaders.

There are times when it may be that a specific faculty member is not able to produce adequate completion rates and other faculty should be assigned. Data is available for the past several years. There are some continuing areas of concern. Colleges with many “flagged” courses should elect to work with the top 5 that affect the largest number of students.

Technology Support

Recommendation 6: Increase the ongoing quality and amount of support for students, faculty, and staff involved with online learning and technology use in instruction.

Objectives in support of the goal:

- a. Make the backup e-learning administrator a continuing position, rather than the current year-to-year assignment
- b. Expand the total number of hours available each week through TAC, in alignment with peak use hours of TAC services and FerrisConnect. This would likely include extending the evening hours and expanding the weekend coverage with better-trained student support. TAC is currently training students and scheduling the extended evening hours.
- c. TAC should increase the number of available hours in the week before courses begin, the first two weeks of each semester, and the final two weeks of each semester to meet increased demands of these peak periods.
- d. TAC should employ more professional expertise like that possessed by e-learning administrators. (Employment of an additional technical person is in process.)
- e. As demands dictate, move toward 24x7 for technology support through the TAC.
- f. Continue to survey students and staff to determine desired and appropriate levels of technology support.

Timeline: July 1, 2011, and ongoing

Resources: Estimated \$100,000 additional funding

Responsibility: Information Technology Services and Academic Affairs

Recommendation 7: Enhance communications with students, faculty, and staff about the availability of TAC and IT support services.

Objectives and Implementation Considerations:

- a. Provide all instructors of FerrisConnect courses with information to distribute with their syllabi each semester that lists the available TAC times and scheduled maintenance times/dates for the semester, so that both students and faculty may plan their work accordingly, especially as it relates to scheduled maintenance. This document should become a syllabus attachment for all online courses. This document will also include contact information for TAC, including the web address where times are posted.
- b. Provide regular news updates to instructors at the beginning of each semester, possibly in college- or department-wide meetings, about new features, tools, changes, etc.
- c. Promote TAC assistance and hours at the MyFSU login page
- d. Produce a FAQ sheet for students that includes minimum computer specifications, TAC hours, TAC contact information, etc. Post each semester on MyFSU and in early FerrisConnect pop-up announcements.
- e. Encourage faculty to take the planned monthly maintenance times into account as they plan assignment due dates. IT services will post the maintenance schedule on the MyTechSupport webpage as well as continue to post monthly and other dates on the FerrisConnect front page
- f. Further develop the capabilities of TAC personnel to address FerrisConnect issues.

Timeline – Begin August 2011

Resources: Time and communication within colleges and IT.

Responsibility: Information Technology Services and Department Heads/Chairs

Recommendation 8: Promote the ongoing exploration of, and recommendations for, the use of new and existing academic technology.

Objectives and Implementation Considerations:

- a. The FerrisConnect Advisory Board should continue to review alternative course management systems and make its recommendations, as appropriate, to the Provost as soon as the evaluation period is completed. Review of systems will be a continual responsibility of this group.
- b. A task force (or committee or subgroup of FAB or another entity) should investigate and evaluate academic technology options.
- c. The Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning should expand its training and support for the use of academic technology with a more decentralized approach (at the individual, program, and college level.)
- d. The FerrisConnect Advisory Board should also continue to assume responsibility for reviewing emerging technology solutions for academic technologies (those primarily related to support of instruction) for all forms of delivery, such as recording technologies, mobile technologies, etc.) in order to recommend improvements to the Ferris learning technology infrastructure.

Timeline – Begin January 2012

Resources: Time and likely academic technology investments along with a possible academic technology coordinator.

Responsibility: Academic Affairs and Information Technology Services

Note: Consideration should be given to a separate structure for academic technology. It may be that FAB should make its recommendations to the Academic Leadership Council.

Planning and Administration

Recommendation 9: Develop an administrative structure that encourages quality and viability of online learning at Ferris.

Objectives and Implementation Considerations:

- a. Appoint a full-time director of online learning; job description forthcoming. Qualifications for the position would require teaching and course development experience so that the individual can provide curricular leadership as well as operational leadership.
- b. Teaching position descriptions need to add knowledge of online teaching to faculty positions in all applicable areas. Suggested wording for faculty postings: “Ferris offers many online courses and programs and is committed to the highest standards in their delivery. Successful candidates for teaching assignments must possess online teaching skills in teaching online and blended courses.”
- c. Recognizing that, for the foreseeable future, resources will continue to be scarce, mechanisms must be developed that enable investing in development and support of online offerings. To provide this ongoing support and growth, investments will likely require reallocation of current resources.
- d. Adopt the Quality Scorecard for the Administration of Online Programs and utilize annually in planning for online improvements.
- e. Specify that each College of the University will make online offerings available wherever feasible, with a goal of enrolling a minimum of 10% of the College’s enrollment through online courses within 3 years.
- f. Require each dean and department head to produce an annual report of improvement efforts accomplished in support of online learning and summarizing comparative performance. This review will be integral to the annual performance evaluation of the dean or department head.
- g. The administrative structure must have sufficient authority to enable them to meet the expectations outlined in this series of recommendations.
- h. Continue to develop policies and procedures to support all recommendations that require policy statements – such as attendance taking, ongoing training, etc.
- i. Administrators will assure that faculty—including adjuncts— assigned to teach online are provided adequate training and support to enable them to be effective online teachers.

Recommendation 10: Create a financial model that is sustainable and aligns with the university’s strategic plan.

Objectives and Implementation Considerations:

- a. Establish class sizes within financial realities. Since significant study, with related proposals exist, a clear chosen policy will aid in instructional planning.

- b. Develop and fund an appropriate budget. Present base budget includes only these items: Asst Dean in CPTS; Secretary in CPTS; FerrisConnect (FC) and related licenses; Limited software/hardware support; E-learning administrator; Very limited travel or training in FC budget.
- c. Determine the desired financial model: Incentives or not? Break-even or profit center? Funding following SCH or programs or admission type?
- d. Assure adequate online sections to meet student demand. This requires general education areas particularly to develop a pool of talent for teaching extra sections.
- e. Brand the Ferris online presence as FerrisOnline (FeOn for short).

Timeline: Post Director position in Fall 2011 for Summer 2012 hire.

Resources: Online learning director position with academic expertise along with online operations will require a minimum of \$100,000 plus benefits.

Responsibility: Academic Affairs and Office of Extended and International Operations

Recommendation 11: Assure compliance with applicable state and federal guidelines and integrity of online systems.

Objectives and Implementation Considerations:

- a. Implement the policy that all Ferris courses with reduced in-class time must be conducted through the FerrisConnect course management system.
- b. Develop and implement an online course attendance policy and procedures.
- c. Produce regular tracking reports from FerrisConnect, after determining which reports can yield most useful information. Examples of periodic reports may include reports of students' and faculty time in class and of use of varied tools. For example, 5% of the classes could be "tested" each month.
- d. Systems need to enable University to verify students' "attendance" in the online course. Attention will focus first on courses with highest enrollments as well as multiple-section courses. Online course syllabi should clearly illustrate how "attendance" will be considered.
- e. Assure that all courses meet ADA Compliance requirements.
- f. Provide an annual update on progress for each recommendation.
- g. Recommend and implement a student authentication system that meets emerging expectations for proving student identity for implementation for January 2013 courses.
- h. Initiate maintaining backup of all courses for a period of three years by August 2011.

Timeline – Begin June 2011 and ongoing

Resources: Time and communication within colleges. Additional financial resources for compliance on authentication, attendance, and storage, of course, remain to be determined.

Responsibility: Information Technology Services and Academic Affairs

Note: FCTL is encouraged to incorporate technology maintenance and TAC open hour schedules into training for FerrisConnect and/or online instruction. This information should be included in the faculty's first-of-the-semester newsletter, with the suggestion that these maintenance times be included in the course materials.