



Revised

MEMORANDUM

March 19, 2013

TO: Members of the Board of Trustees
FROM: Nancy L. Zimpher, Chancellor
SUBJECT: Growth of SUNY Online Instruction and Resources

Action Requested

The proposed resolution approves principles and establishes policy to facilitate and support growth in online instruction and resources, under the name Open SUNY, within the State University.

Resolution

I recommend that the Board of Trustees adopt the following resolution:

Whereas SUNY's approach to online instruction, centering on the delivery of high quality, well-supported courses and programs taught by qualified faculty, is nationally recognized as an exemplar; and

Whereas nearly all SUNY campuses offer online instruction, with the majority utilizing the technology and the faculty and student support services provided by the Office of Academic Technology and Instructional Support within the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost, which includes the SUNY Learning Network, the Center for Professional Development, and the Office of Library and Information Services; and

Whereas enrollment in SUNY online courses and degree programs across the State University has consistently grown, with over 86,000 students registering for at least one online course in 2012; and

Whereas SUNY currently offers thousands of courses online that meet SUNY General Education Requirements and/or are SUNY Transfer Path courses in academic majors that can seamlessly transfer across campuses; and

Whereas SUNY Board of Trustees' policies and standards for academic quality and integrity apply to all academic programs and courses, regardless of mode of delivery; and

Whereas the number of complete online degree programs offered through SUNY is comparably modest for a system of its size and is limited by a lack of system-wide mechanisms for campuses and faculty to share established courses and intellectual content; and

Whereas the well-established model of evaluating prior learning—including military service and other career or life experiences, and which is based on regional accreditation standards and nationally recognized adult learning principles—used by SUNY's Empire State College has the potential to be implemented across SUNY; and

Whereas *The Power of SUNY* strategic plan, endorsed by the SUNY Trustees, includes a commitment to grow online courses, degree programs, resources and support in order to: increase access to a SUNY education; further student success through seamless transfer and timely degree completion; provide enhanced learning opportunities through online education and experiential learning; and attract new students and serve alumni; and

Whereas SUNY experience demonstrates that optimal student success in online learning requires robust faculty development, student and faculty support services, ongoing assessments, and a well-supported technical infrastructure; and

Whereas a Chancellor's Online Education Advisory Team ("Advisory Team") comprised of representatives from across SUNY worked collaboratively to identify strategic goals for growing online education across SUNY and has presented its recommendations in a publicly available report which has been shared with the SUNY Trustees (copy on file in the Office of the Secretary of the University); and

Whereas the Chancellor accepted the recommendations of the Advisory Team and in the 2013 State of the University address identified specific priorities for implementation, including, but not limited to: adding additional online bachelor's degree programs in high needs labor market areas; offering credit assessment of prior learning experiences and credit validation from high profile, accredited institutions; growing online enrollments to exceed 100,000; utilizing advances in online learning to offer credit-

based experiential education opportunities, including co-operative, internship/practicum, research, service learning and community service experiences, and international study; defining three-year pathways for certain bachelor's degrees; and, supporting SUNY faculty, particularly members of SUNY's Distinguished Faculty Academy, in delivering Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs); now, therefore, be it

Resolved that the following will guide the expansion of online education courses, degree programs and resources within the State University, under the name "Open SUNY":

- The Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost is directed to:
 - Develop an implementation and financial plan for the recommendations of the Online Education Advisory Team and the related goals outlined in the 2013 State of the University presentation for the purposes of increasing System support to students and faculty in the expansion of online courses, degree programs and resources at all SUNY campuses. This plan shall address related business policies and practices and include, but not be limited to, an expansion of services delivered by the Office of Academic Technology and Instructional Support. This plan shall be developed in broad consultation with University constituencies, including campus leadership, the University Faculty Senate, the Faculty Council of Community Colleges and the Student Assembly.
 - Explore the scaling up of Empire State College's prior learning assessment (PLA) program to all SUNY campuses to support student success and degree completion.
 - Develop a research initiative, utilizing the expertise of SUNY faculty, to identify best practices and professional development initiatives in support of online learning; and develop a mechanism for evaluating SUNY's progress in meeting goals in this area, including the assessment of student learning and quality of instruction.
 - Explore and implement, in conjunction with campus leadership and SUNY faculty, and in a manner consistent with campus governance practices, strategies that will promote academic excellence, encourage innovation and reduce cost barriers to education and research, including but not limited to:

Open Education Resources, Open Access Journals, Open E-Textbooks, and Open Courseware; and with System support, faculty from all SUNY campuses will be encouraged to openly license the instructional content they produce so that campuses may build capacity to offer more courses and programs online.

- Identify and implement, in conjunction with campus leadership and SUNY faculty, new and expanded online programs that meet state workforce needs, support workforce development, provide international experiences, and include options for time-shortened degree completion, e.g., three-year baccalaureate.
- Consistent with federal and State financial aid and other regulations, work with campuses to create a SUNY-wide consortial structure to facilitate student access to online courses and programs, ensuring affordability, and supporting timely and expedited degree attainment.

Background

SUNY has been a pioneer in online learning since the launch of the SUNY Learning Network (SLN) in 1994 as part of a major grant award from the Sloan Foundation. Now part of the Office of Academic Technology and Instructional Support within the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost, SLN provides a complete support infrastructure for online faculty development and course design, course management software, technical infrastructure, and help desk services for faculty and students, as well as marketing services for campuses. Currently, this is done on an opt-in basis by campuses. At present, SUNY's online offerings include over 90 associate's degree programs, 40 bachelor's degree programs, 20 master's degree programs, over 35 certificate programs, and more than 7,000 courses, all fully online.

Over the past decade, online learning has evolved from providing convenient and flexible access, to a variety of instructional models and a diverse and innovative blend of programs and services. Every aspect of instruction, whether on the ground or online, is now infused with web-based technologies and practices, social media and mobile learning. SUNY has made significant investments to keep pace with the consumer-driven proliferation and use of mobile devices, from laptops to smart phones and tablets, but there is still room to do much more.

Open SUNY, and the expansion of SUNY's online offerings was first described in the *Power of SUNY* strategic plan as part of the SUNY and the World "big idea." A direct outcome of the Chancellor's 64 Campus Listening Tour and multiple State-wide Conversations, the plan was developed in consultation with all SUNY constituencies. The plan recognized that by building on SUNY's

current open and online initiatives, Open SUNY has the potential to be America's most extensive distance learning environment.

The Innovative Instruction Transformation Team was established as part of the Implementation phase of the *Power of SUNY*. This team furthered the concepts of Open SUNY and called for a transformed SUNY Learning Network to support innovative teaching and learning across the system. Specifics of the proposal included a SUNY Learning Commons (currently in beta testing), an enhanced Center for Professional Development, a Digital Concierge to help learners in the system discover opportunities, and a Center focused on applied research in teaching and learning.

In April of 2012, the Chancellor convened the Online Education Advisory Team to develop an integrated proposal that would detail how SUNY could evolve to be the biggest and best online public university system in the world. The Chancellor chaired and actively participated in discussions with this high level team which represented broad stakeholder interests across SUNY. It is toward the achievement of the goals outlined in the Advisory Team's report and in the 2013 State of the University address, that the policy modifications included in this resolution are proposed.