

**UGA Office of Online Learning
Academic and Administrative Support Unit Review Report
Final Report: April 4, 2019**

Review Team Membership

Anna M. Scheyett, Dean, School of Social Work

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Review Team Timetable

June 8, 2018	Review Team appointed
October 12, 2018	Review Team meets with Katie Chapman
October 15, 2018	Self-Study report sent electronically to Review Team
November 28, 2018	Review Team meets to design data collection procedures
December 13, 2018	Review Team conducts interview with Rahul Shrivastav, Vice President of Instruction
December 13, 2018	Review Team conducts interview with Jessica Daniels, Program Coordinator, Online BBA, Terry College of Business
December 13, 2018	Review Team conducts interview with Meg Hines, College of Education
December 17, 2018	Review Team conducts interview with James Castle, OOL
December 18, 2018	Review Team conducts interview with Office of Online Learning staff
December 19, 2018	Review Team conducts interview with Stephen Balfour, Director, Office of Online Learning
January 7, 2019	Review Team sends OOL customer survey
January 8, 2019	Review Team sends OOL staff interview question survey (anonymous)
January 9, 2019	OOL leadership team interview: Nancy Byron, Marketing and Communications Manager, Office of Online Learning
January 16, 2019	OOL customer interview: Tony Mallon, Director, Institute for Nonprofit Organizations, School of Social Work

January 22, 2019	Review Team meets to draft report
February 21, 2019	Draft report is submitted for review
April 4, 2019	Report is submitted to Office of the Provost
April 10, 2019	Final report is submitted to the unit

Review Team Procedures

The evaluation by the Review Team followed established UGA policies and procedures. The review team was organized and charged by Katie Chapman on October 12, 2018. Interview sessions occurred in December 2018 and January 2019.

The findings and recommendations of the Review Team on a number of data points. The team read the October 2018 Self-Study from the Office of Online Learning (OOL). Interviews were held with OOL staff Steve Balfour, James Castle, and Nancy Byron. A group interview was held with the OOL staff, and a follow-up survey was sent to collect anonymous responses from OOL personnel. Interviews were also held with previous OOL clients Tony Mallon (School of Social Work), Jessica Daniels (Terry College of Business), and Meg Hines (College of Education). An electronic survey was also sent to faculty identified as clients from the past two years.

Summary of Findings

The Office of Online Learning (OOL) is a production and support unit, founded in 2012, that contains instruction design, marketing and communication, media production, and state authorization expertise among its staff. Initially charged with increasing the number of online undergraduate courses for summer terms and identifying and developing graduate and professional programs with the highest promise for online delivery, OOL maintains that focus while also addressing a number of other charges from the university (e.g., marketing, compliance).

The OOL's purpose is threefold: to create and support the teaching of new graduate programs, to create and support the teaching of undergraduate summer programs, and to provide support broadly for new and existing forms of online learning at UGA. The unit has surpassed previous 2020 goals (increase the number of graduate programs offered online), and has set a stretch goal for 2022 to have a total of 1,000 enrollments in online programs (both graduate and undergraduate) over the 529 enrollments from fall 2017.

Despite a fairly fixed budget, OOL's strategic direction from leadership has leveraged current resources efficiently. The unit's marketing team keeps pace with schools spending 8x as much on marketing (though units across UGA invest e-rate differential into marketing). The instructional design team is recognized nationally for their innovation in creating technology to deploy in online courses at UGA (e.g., the online physical education class for walking). OOL support programming for the growth of online programs includes: the Online Learning Fellows program, targeted investment in new online

graduate programs with high market potential, and supporting units in the outsourcing of course development with third-party vendors.

At present, three sets of competing priorities are problematic for OOL: the creation of new versus maintenance of existing online programs, staff salary budget versus operating and advertising budget, and building in-unit/department capacity for instructional design versus central capacity in the Office of Online Learning. In addition, staff spend time creating widgets to meet the needs of online courses which could otherwise be purchased (e.g., peer review).

Evaluation

Strengths:

Within its existing resources, the Office of Online Learning has made significant contributions to the University. It has more than met the goal of Strategic Direction II, increasing the number of online graduate programs from seven to thirty. Similarly, the OOL's work to develop summer undergraduate programs (Strategic Direction I) has resulted in a 270% increase in enrollment since 2015.

OOL has supported faculty development of online courses in two primary ways. First is through the Online Learning Fellows program, where faculty work through the Fellows programs to learn online course development and complete the development of an online course. In FY 19, OOL supported 32 Online Learning Fellows and assisted with the development of 30 new courses. Overall, in FY 19 OOL has supported the development of 50 new online courses.

The second way in which OOL supports the development of new online courses is through specific partnerships with academic units to develop online graduate programs. These partnerships have occurred through targeted grants (resulting in 2 nascent online graduate programs) and through collaborations initiated by specific units. In these collaborations, OOL has provided instructional design support for course development. In two cases, OOL's design capacity was fully committed at the time of request, so they assisted the unit in finding external support—once through identifying an hourly instructional designer, and once by brokering an agreement with Wiley Publishing to provide course development. OOL projects that it will help create and launch eight new online graduate programs between Fall 2018 and Fall 2022.

In addition to online course development, OOL provides tailored marketing and enrollment support to online programs, ranging from simply listing the program on the online.uga.edu website to full advertising support, digital marketing, and enrollment coaching.

A final major activity of OOL is State Authorization and Student Service Coordination. OOL is building a strong national state authorization network for authorization of online course provision in other states. This is a labor intensive and detailed process, which will expand over time as states are required to provide more information (e.g. out of state learning placements) to the national body NC SARA (National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements).

OOL is to be commended for the quality of its service. A survey of faculty currently teaching in online programs revealed that overall faculty are satisfied with the level of support received.

Survey of Faculty Currently Teaching in Online Programs (n = 27, 17.88% response rate)

During my engagement with the Office of Online Learning, the level of satisfaction with (1=not at all satisfied, 5=highly satisfied)	Mean	Std Dev.
the helpfulness of staff	4.58	.69
expertise of staff	4.38	.62
responsiveness of staff	4.50	.75
helpfulness in facilitating connections with other units that support online education	3.65	1.07
timeliness in project delivery	4.25	.76
opportunities for professional learning for faculty about online education	3.88	1.01
creativity/innovation	3.76	.95
assistance with marketing my course or program	3.58	1.08
assistance with program development	3.75	1.05

Currently, OOL has a budget of nearly \$1.4M. Since 2016, the office’s budget has grown by slightly more than \$31,000. OOL staff consists of 14 positions: a Director, Administrative Manager, five Instructional Design positions (with one to two vacant at any given time), three Media positions, three marketing positions (one temporary), and one State Authorization and Student Services position. In addition, OOL hires several part-time temporary student workers. OOL is primarily housed in the Bank of America building off-campus, but the Media team is housed in the Center for Teaching and Learning on campus.

The Review Team identified areas for challenges in three primary domains: Resources, Coordination, and Building versus Maintaining. Challenges are described below with exemplars. These challenges are followed by a set of recommendations for the Office.

Challenges:

Instructional Design Capacity and General Staff Numbers. Lack of instructional design capacity in personnel is a concern in meeting demand for support in developing new programs and courses. In one case, this resulted in a unit having to use an external vendor at a much higher cost (\$30,000 per course) than would have been incurred with an in-house designer. The lack of personnel capacity resulted in occasions where at least one partnering unit reported a lack of responsiveness on the part of the Office during the course development process. Maintenance of online options at UGA will likely be hampered by maintaining the same number of OOL staff. To augment the number of courses/programs, it is likely that instructional design, marketing, and compliance staff will be needed.

Budget. Many challenges noted in this review team's engagement with campus colleagues can be tied to a budget that has been flat for four years. Low staffing levels and vacant positions are a result of low salaries; it was reported to us that instructional designers can sometimes make 50% more in the same role in a private firm in Atlanta, and are not competitive locally (e.g., Oconee School System pays an average of \$80,172.27 for a front-line instructional technologist with no supervisory role and with fewer workdays in a year. Clarke County pays an average of \$69,909.34 with a 190-day contract, comparable to a 9-month UGA contract. OOL's 12-month non-supervisory IDs average salary is \$57,582.45 and James, their supervisor, makes \$69,140.76—all lower than the K-12 non-supervisory average salaries.) With a flat budget, OOL has been forced to use a higher and higher portion of the budget for salaries, leaving less for other operations such as marketing. Thinly stretched marketing capacity is the result of a thin budget. It was reported to us that other comparable universities invest eight times as much in their online marketing efforts as UGA does, often times centralized in the institution's marketing and communications unit.

Marketing capacity. While the marketing unit works with many programs, there is more demand than they can meet. In addition, one interviewee noted that it was unclear which marketing tasks are the responsibility of the Office versus the unit; this confusion is likely due to Marketing's inability to take on all marketing tasks due to lack of staffing. Marketing strategies appear to be minimally supported with the limited budget that is afforded OOL. Coordination with other units on campus engaged in their own marketing efforts is also constrained by the number of staff available in OOL to support this component of online efforts. For example, last academic year, a large-scale roll-out of marketing dollars was advanced by the Graduate School with little coordination with OOL or schools/colleges. An enrollment coach to move inquiries to applications to enrollment is one additional way that OOL has addressed consistency in connecting with the applicant pool. This position, however, is temporary and any gains made in word-of-mouth advertising about responsiveness might be minimized if the position is sunsetted.

Establishing a University-Wide Mission and Vision. Our interviews revealed a lack of mission/vision for online learning that is fostered across campus and on a unit-by-unit basis. OOL is unable to forecast upcoming demand for online program development. Several of our interviewees expressed frustration that there is not enough coordinated support for the development of online programs. Some units, and faculty with them, do not have a clear plan for developing online programs and courses, or may not understand the fiscal issues involved (e.g. if class sizes are very limited, there will not be enough revenue generated to support the course development.) This can result in OOL working with a unit that may later decide not to continue with the online course or vacillate in level of commitment to an online program, in a way that results in OOL feeling like it is "spinning its wheels." While several units may desire to invest in instructional design support, and instructional design support can be difficult to obtain unless paying a competitive salary, there is no coordinated effort to identify opportunities for cost sharing of instructional designer support according to upcoming need. If all colleges and schools submitted online learning plans to forecast future development of online programs and courses, units may be able to collaboratively invest in instructional design support that enables high touch support during large volume online program development.

Community and Professional Development for Online Learning. In general, the review team found that professional learning is fragmented at the university. Several of our interviewees expressed a desire for more professional development, especially for more advanced pedagogical techniques for online learning or that facilitate progress in the development and maintenance of online courses. Some OOL staff expressed a desire to engage in the development and implementation of professional development

curriculum in addition to the successful high-touch Online Learning Fellows program, but overwhelmingly expressed a lack of available time to engage in this endeavor. Although OOL has a robust fellows program for online course development, this program only can support a fraction of faculty in need of professional learning in this area. Support provided through some colleges on campus also is uneven. Continuous development for faculty skills to implement the latest technology or update courses for ADA and other compliance is not universally structured across the university (e.g., within flipped classrooms, use of particular software packages in online courses, inefficient instructional strategies). There is also a need for the development of a network of peer faculty and coordinators engaged in online learning. Several of our interviewees, both faculty and program coordinators, noted a desire to connect with others at UGA engaged in the development and maintenance of online programs, and noted that the development of such a peer community would facilitate the growth and development of skills among the broader faculty at UGA. Such a community would provide a venue for sharing of effective practices and opportunities for alumni of Online Learning Fellows to keep their skills current. Furthermore, networking and peer mentoring relationships between group members would foster a culture that values online learning at UGA.

Compliance. Challenges in meeting the tasks required for compliance with NC-SARA are present. With only one individual responsible for this for the entire university, as programs grow it will be difficult to comply with mandates with OOL's existing staff. The university's reliance on OOL to fully absorb NC-SARA compliance for online programs is likely placing the overall institution at risk. In addition, constraints with the learning management system and the interplay with the Board of Regents do not allow for flexibility in meeting student/faculty needs or ensuring the timeliness of access when protracted technical concerns impede access to learning. It appears that ELC support is diffused across campus resulting in student and faculty confusion about where the best source of support might be found for a given concern. Online learning students are also at a disadvantage in accessing other ancillary university resources (e.g., Career Center). Although OOL has taken steps to begin to address this concern, only one student services official for 570 students (Fall 2018 numbers) also places the university at risk for fully supporting student needs.

Space. Lack of space to grow and an off-campus location is of concern. OOL has completely filled its available space and will not be able to accommodate the additional staff it needs. In addition, as noted by one interviewee, the off-campus location results in an "out of sight, out of mind" phenomenon, wherein OOL might not regularly be thought of as part of the campus. Finally, the separation of the media unit, while excellent for collaboration with CTL, results in some fragmentation of the OOL team.

Technical Infrastructure and Procurement. Several interviewees noted that there are occasions where, because of lack of resources and technical expertise, OOL cannot purchase existing software or servers needed for a particular program or course. Sometimes they are able to develop the software themselves, but that is very time consuming and detracts from the other demands on the Office. OOL is hampered by other university offices that constrain their ability to address goals and initiatives in real time. For example, procurement delayed access to an applicant management system, Hubspot, given its online presence and the fact that it was a 3rd party, cloud-based application. Some experimental efforts by programs also get in the way and cause more work (e.g., instructional decisions that necessitate the development of apps that were not budgeted in staff workload).

Service-Level Agreements. OOL has clearly communicated to clients the variety of options/tiers of support available (in house vs. partially or fully outsourced) for both course development and marketing phases. However, there is some lack of understanding from faculty on the services OOL offers. There is a need for standard service level agreements (SLA) that can be provided to clients, outlining the degree of support from OOL and expectations of client unit. Nearly every individual interviewed expressed the need for clarified expectations of both the OOL and the client unit, with regard to marketing, services provided during course or program development, launch, and post-launch periods. In one case, a lack of SLA led to uncertainty of the allocation of responsibilities in marketing post-program launch; as a result, the client program hired student workers to help gather the information needed by OOL to execute a marketing plan (e.g., who and what venues marketing campaigns should target). Some concerns were expressed by OOL staff about faculty who accept OOL resources but who do not deliver on completed course projects. In other interviews, staff noted that competing demands often resulted in delayed or missed deadlines by clients with no criteria for management, slowing progress or reducing overall final quality during course development. With specific regard to the post-launch period, several interviewees wished that existing online courses could be reviewed and refreshed over time. For example, some faculty engage as repeat clients because they wish to scale their courses or to fine tune their course offering for improved student learning or engagement. These repeat customers can be challenging as they are not configured in infrastructure and workloads of existing staff.

Curricular Concerns. OOL has no engagement with the university curriculum process, with exception of a newly created position, Director of Program Development for extended campuses within OVPI, charged with coordinating program development across all extended campuses. It is unclear whether the incumbent in this position is engaged in the course or program approval faculty governance process. At present, the approval of online programs occurs whether or not OOL has the capacity to fully support the development of approved programs; likewise, program approval may not be linked to market demand research. There is little collaboration from a curricular perspective regarding inclusion of OOL when courses or programs are proposed. OOL staff agree that a member of their leadership team could serve as a resource to the university curriculum process with regard to online curriculum approvals. In addition, involvement in the curriculum process for both graduate and undergraduate education would provide the opportunity for OOL to stay abreast of upcoming demands of their office. For example, although faculty governance enables the construction of courses or the establishment of programs, online courses are more challenging for some programs than others. Online courses/programs are proposed with limited input from OOL resulting in haphazard development of online courses that are often subject to concerns of limited attention to best practices or regulatory compliance. Courses and programs also follow the semester-based approach to instructional delivery perhaps restricting the potential applicant pool. It appears that development of courses and programs is not connected with a strategic plan for maximizing student interest or market demand. In addition, UGA does not have as part of its portfolio some of the most common and in demand online programs found at our peer institutions.

Summary. The charge to build successful online courses and programs at UGA is challenged by the resources and infrastructure needed to support such a charge. This challenge is found in inconsistent professional learning opportunities and unclear responsibilities for overall coordination of key components of online education (e.g., marketing, compliance). Some of the challenge is facilitated through a history of field-initiated courses and programs instead of a strategic planning process based on market demand, faculty capacity, and the university's general approach on high-quality but limited enrollment in graduate education programs. This history and resourcing pattern will likely result in

maintenance of programs instead of augmenting both the quality and number of high-demand programs without some coordination and resources.

Recommendations

Based on challenges noted for the Office of Online Learning, a number of recommendations should be considered. These recommendations include:

1. Colleges and schools that plan to have an online presence should engage in a planning process with the Office of Online Learning. Academic unit plans should include a sustainability plan for courses in the event that key faculty members involved in course development depart.
2. OOL should initiate a network of peers engaged in the online and hybrid teaching space. This organized campus community, consisting of program coordinators, Online Learning Fellow alumni, and friends could function similar to UGA's EdTech group. A listserv or slack channel and networking events would provide opportunities for participants to connect beyond disciplinary boundaries.
3. OOL should propose workshops aimed at faculty teaching online and hybrid courses for inclusion in the CTL annual workshop series. Partnership with the CTL may entail collaboration of CTL and OOL staff in coordinating and facilitating workshops, or the identification and recruitment of talented faculty and program coordinators working in the hybrid and online teaching environments. The inclusion of Online Learning Fellow alumni and program coordinators would additionally foster the development of community among those teaching online, providing a venue for peer mentoring between faculty teaching in online and hybrid spaces.
4. OOL should create standard service level agreements for OOL/unit partnerships, containing criteria to ensure that significant projects undertaken by OOL are completed on time and to clearly communicate the level of responsibility and service that can be expected of both the OOL and client unit. Service level agreements should outline expectations of service during course/program development, launch, and post-launch periods, and for the variety of support tiers available to OOL clients.
5. The OOL director could serve as an ex officio member or advisory resource to the university curriculum subcommittee, allowing OOL to be involved particularly with online curriculum approvals. In addition, OOL and graduate school should establish a clear line of communication with regard to approval and resource allocation for the development and implementation of online graduate curriculum.
6. Resources proportionate to the task of developing high-quality courses and programs should be provided to OOL in an ongoing fashion to allow the university to optimize its online learning presence in an ongoing and sustainable way.