

Strategic Plan for Distance Education 2007-2009

Providing quality education to students on-campus and at a distance

Prepared by the Distance Education Committee
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Vision Statement

Accessible, flexible, and quality distance education at the University of Maine at Fort Kent *will transform peoples' lives* and *help them attain their educational goals* by connecting distant learner needs with educational resources by way of cutting edge information technology and a variety of instructional pedagogies for distance learners.

Mission Statement

Distance education will uphold and enhance the mission of the University of Maine at Fort Kent through a committed to the following:

- support learners at a distance, in rural places, to gain access to quality, affordable, and convenient education;
- provide access and ongoing relationships with UMFK and its resources;
- maintain academic integrity and excellence by supporting highly qualified faculty, committed to the highest standards of teaching, scholarship, and research
- create, deliver, and evaluate distance learning courses and student learning outcomes in a fashion that corresponds to expectations of face-to-face classes;
- use technology, without being defined by technology; and
- help learners achieve their educational goals by fostering better retention and graduation rates and encouraging lifelong learning.

Distance Education and the Institutional Core Values

Distance education at UMFK reflects the *Institutional Core Values* in the following respects:

Education

- Provide high quality, accessible, and affordable education
- Use Cutting edge information technology

The Person

- Foster professionalism, accountability, leadership, and citizenry

Environment

- Emphasize personal service and access to resources
- Provide a technologically advanced academic and distance learning environment

Community

- Support life-long learners
- Deliver programs that promote a sense of community

Diversity

- Cultivate respect for human differences
- Preparation to meet the changing needs of society

Distance Education Priorities & Objectives

Following the *Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs*, created by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education and adopted by the six regional accreditation agencies in 2001, including the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, the Distance Education Committee has identified the following strategic priorities to ensure the delivery of high quality distance education.

Priority 1: Institutional Context and Commitment

Distance education, as an integral and congruent component of UMFK's mission, will use sound instructional design principles and leading technologies, "to prepare students for lifelong learning and success as professionals and engaged citizens of a democracy" by providing access to higher education to students in rural communities through the delivery of quality online instruction.

Goals

- 1A. Support the achievement of UMFK's mission statement to ensure commitment to:
 - "High quality affordable and accessible education"
 - "Technically advanced academic and distance learning environment"
 - "Student preparation to meet the changing needs of society"
 - "Programs which foster a sense of community"
- 1B. Ensure the institution budget and policy statements reflect its commitment to the students enrolled in distance courses
- 1C. Continue to refine an internal organizational structure that enables the development, coordination, support, communication and oversight of distance education.
- 1D. Monitor the impact distance education has on enrollment in on-campus courses.

Priority 2: Curriculum and Instruction

Quality curricular programming and student learning outcomes will be presented, managed, and monitored by the division chairs, program coordinators, Academic Council, as is appropriate, with oversight by the Vice President for Academic Affairs.

Goals

- 2A. Develop strategic academic programming for distance courses
- 2B. Develop a coherent course sequencing plan to ensure access to all students to complete necessary program or general education requirements
- 2C. Insist that policies and procedures for proposal and development of new distance courses are followed
- 2D. Ensure course design fosters appropriate interaction between instructor and students, and among students and content
- 2E. Set appropriate course enrollment caps to ensure academic quality
- 2F. Ensure that substantive curricular changes are reported to NEASC (e.g., new programs offered at a distance)

Priority 3: Evaluation and Assessment

Through annual reports and program review, the divisions will monitor overall effectiveness of its distance education program/courses to assure alignment with institutional priorities, achievement of student educational objectives, and congruency with NEASC expectations with oversight by the Academic Assessment Committee.

Goals

- 3A. Include policy statements regarding the academic integrity of students work at a distance in the student handbook
- 3B. Develop procedures for proctoring and administration of examinations
- 3C. Assure the security of personal student information and evaluation results
- 3D. Charge the academic divisions with the responsibility to assess the student learning outcomes assessment and program effectiveness of distance education according to NEASC expectations
- 3E. Ensure appropriate campus committees address continuous quality improvement areas related to distance education
- 3F. Administer course evaluations in all online courses ensuring that students are confident in their anonymity

Priority 4: Faculty Support

The faculty at UMFK is dedicated to developing and teaching quality distance education courses.

Goals

- 4A. Require all faculty to participate and complete formal training in teaching online (i.e. five-week "Short Course" offered by UMS) before offering their first online course
- 4B. Ensure faculty are aware of and follow campus policy on intellectual property
- 4C. Monitor faculty workload and ensure adequate compensation for overloads
- 4D. Offer regular periodic training to faculty in the areas of pedagogy and the use of course management technologies to ensure proficiency
- 4E. Provide additional training to staff supporting faculty and students
- 4F. Work closely with University College to better communicate to faculty information about system-wide services
- 4G. Hire a distance education instructional designer to support faculty course development

Priority 5: Student Support

UMFK staff and faculty strive to create a positive and supportive learning environment for its distance education students.

Goals

- 5A. Ensure appropriate services are available for students at a distance including advising, bookstore, career planning and placement, disability accommodations, early alert, financial aid, library, registration, technical support, and tutoring
- 5B. Advise students about the expectations of online courses, both curricular and technological. Encourage students to complete a detailed questionnaire to determine readiness before enrolling in an online course (i.e. “Are online courses for you?”)
- 5C. Refine the process by which students are informed about the following: accessing their course, start times, course expectations, library services, and campus policies, e.g., add/drop policy
- 5D. Continue to create a sense of community at the course and institutional level for distance learners

Priority 6: Technical Support

Assure adequacy of technical facilities including appropriate staffing and technical assistance.

Goals

- 6A. Provide technical support services including help desk services for students and faculty
- 6B. Ensure a single course management system is robust and reliable enough to deliver quality courses
- 6C. Assess the need for additional technical staff to support students and faculty
- 6D. Incorporate technologies in course design to increase the understanding of course content
- 6E. Develop courses which use technologies that are readily accessible and do not limit accessibility

Strategic Planning Assumptions

Education Assumptions

- “By early 2008, one out of 10 college students will be enrolled in an online degree program - Boston-based market research firm Eduventures estimated last year.” (Wall Street Journal, May 2006)
- Half of distance education students were enrolled part-time compared with only 10% of other students (NSSE 2006)
- Students living in rural communities will enroll in online courses as their only means to access higher education.
- Distance courses will be developed under the same academic standards as on-campus courses.
- Faculty will receive adequate training, both pedagogical and technical, to deliver high quality distance education.

Economic Assumptions

- Adequate campus funding will be available to support both the instructional and technical costs of delivering distance courses.

Political Assumptions

- Distance education plays an integral role in achievement of UMFK’s mission.

Social Assumptions

- 64 percent of students enrolled in an online programming lived within the same geographic region as the institution offering the program, and 36 percent of them lived within 50 miles (Chronicle of Higher Education, March 2007).
- NSSE 2006 Report States:
 - Seventy percent of distance education students were caring for dependents.
 - Half of distance education students worked at jobs more than 30 hours per week.
 - Distance education students were older on average: The median age of first-year distance learners was 25 and 32 for seniors. Their counterparts were 18 and 22 years, respectively.
 - Sixty-three percent of distance education students were first generation compared with 42% of other students.
 - Distance education students generally chose this format for reasons of convenience and being able to work at their own pace.

University of Maine System Assumptions

- The UMS implementation of PeopleSoft will take into consideration the impact on students taking courses across campuses. In particular, with regards to course offerings, registration, add/drop, withdrawal, transcripts, GPA/residency requirements, enrollment reporting, and charges: tuition and fees. Where possible, the system will be developed to place the burden on the campus, not on the student.
- University College will continue to maintain the learn.maine.edu website for marketing.
- AFUM will provide fair compensation for faculty teaching distance courses.
- One course management system will be contracted and maintained by UMS Information Technology Services (ITS), formally UNET.
- A single online course evaluation form will be adopted and approved by AFUM.
- Programming partnerships with the Tri-Campus Consortium and UMS will continue to be investigated in areas such as special education, rural entrepreneurship, masters in education, and criminal justice/public safety.

UMFK Distance Education Advantages & Limitations

Advantages

- Faculty are committed to learning new methodologies that assist in the creation of quality distance education courses.
- Faculty and staff are willing to embrace new technologies that foster the delivery of quality distance education courses.
- Cross-trained staff increases help desk support to faculty and students.
- Technical infrastructure is in place to build and deliver distance education courses.
- Across campus, offices continue to work with distance education staff to find ways to improve services to students enrolled in distance courses.

Limitations

- Resources are finite. The number of courses which can be effectively delivered will be determined by financial and faculty/staff limitations.
- Lack of synchronous class time slots across campuses create scheduling issues for ITV courses.
- Lack of a shared academic calendar and academic policies create issues for students enrolled at multiple campuses.
- Methods to easily collect statistical data in areas related to distance education currently are not available making it hard to project and inform decisions.

UMFK Distance Education Quick Facts

UMFK has developed and delivered 102 distance courses.

Students taking courses at a distance receive comparable grades to on-campus students: 40.3% of on-campus students received A's and 40.1% of distance students received A's.

Student off-campus credit hour generation continues to rise.

