EduCause Presentation Topic Area: Enterprise Resource Planning; Technology Assessment

Principle Presenters:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gary Langer, Assoc. Vice Chancellor</td>
<td>Minnesota Online: Building a System to Deliver Programs at a Distance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lynette Olson, Assessment &amp; Effectiveness Director</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Title: Minnesota Online: Building a System to Deliver Programs at a Distance

Session Description: This session is designed to provoke discussion regarding the lessons learned necessary for advancing and facilitating the delivery of online education and services in a statewide network. Minnesota Online (www.minnesotaonline.org) serves as a vehicle for collaborative pooling and sharing arrangements among the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities by joining together through a statewide network to offer distance learning programs and centralized services.

Targeted Audiences: This session is for attendees who are interested in implementing centralized initiatives and partnerships to provide access to quality courses, programs, and services for students and faculty in an online environment.

I. Presentation

Learners in the 21st Century are increasingly online and digital learners. Through online learning, students are provided access to quality programs and services delivered with convenience and flexibility. Although technology tools are increasingly used in some measure in many courses provided by the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities the courses, programs, and services specifically designated as “online” are those delivered predominately over the Internet and the focus of Minnesota Online.

The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system recognizes that the integration of technology into teaching is essential to our ability to continue to serve our students and to provide the citizens of Minnesota with the flexible, state-of-the-art higher education they have come to expect. It is critical for the System, its leadership, and it’s faculty to best leverage its collective resources to facilitate the effective and efficient utilization of the technology in a manner that responds to student need and that provides quality learning.

State support for higher education has flattened precisely at this time of required investment for the future. Our response is to use existing resources wisely toward the development of a targeted approach to e-learning that leverages resources, encourages partnerships and collaboration, and builds on the unique strengths of our various institutions.

The past decade, quality and quality assurance indicators have become major issues internationally for higher education. Managers of higher education systems and institutions today are concerned about quality and with how to make certain that quality assurance systems
and mechanisms are appropriately implemented in their institutions. Compared with the business sector, only a relatively small number of role model examples of best practices exist in education. Tang (1998) suggests, “It is recognized that benchmarking is not simply a tool to use for dealing with crises and urgent priorities, but an overall drive for gaining superiority in the market place.”

Minnesota Online acknowledges the importance of sharing best practices that recognize a sense of community and encourage success that fully develop and utilize people’s talents.

It is the vision of Minnesota Online that the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities will be a trusted provider of choice for high quality online learning opportunities expanding access for a community of lifelong learners within Minnesota and beyond.

**Purpose Statement for Minnesota Online**

Minnesota Online is comprised of (32) Minnesota State Colleges and Universities institutions to advance and facilitate the delivery of online products and services for its member institutions. Minnesota Online was established to be an internal “innovative enterprise” within the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities’ system for the development and operation of e-learning.

With the need to operate efficiently, effectively, and with due diligence as an “innovative enterprise” for the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities’ system, Minnesota Online operates under the following drivers:

- To meet market demand
- To meet stakeholder expectations
- To promote access
- To respond to increased competition

**Centralized Services**

Minnesota Online serves as a vehicle for collaborative pooling and sharing arrangements among the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities by joining together through a statewide network to offer distance learning programs. Examples of such services are high lighted on the e-Resources web site at: [http://www.eresources.mnscu.edu](http://www.eresources.mnscu.edu)

- **E-Portfolio(e-foliominnesota)** – An electronic portfolio tool for Minnesota students, workers, educators, and citizens in the 21st century. Developed by the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities in alliance with Avenet LLC, and partially funded by a Congressional Award. The e-portfolio is an online version of resumes, experiences, goals, and much more. This platform is designed to be an easy-to-use as possible, with a similarity to “word processing” rather than to HTML and web publishing.

- **E-Services** – Web enabled services offered to students to support e-learning needs through the development of several initiatives, such as; e-mentoring model including services of tutoring, online assessments, study skills, orientation and instructional support.
  - Call Center
  - Support/Help Desk
  - Library/Reference
  - Learning Objects
Seamless Education Services Project – The Seamless Project seeks to identify and reduce the present duplication of actions required of the student within Minnesota State Colleges and Universities. The student will experience one admissions process, one assessment, one point of registration and integrated transcript, one financial aid application process, and one billing statement.

Business Practice Alignment (BPAC) - Designed policies and procedures to ensure uniform practices across the system.

Minnesota Online provides a central location for information about courses and programs that are available to students online. Information is available on programs, courses, and services available online at: www.minnesotaonline.org

Assessment & Effectiveness Model

Minnesota Online established itself as a champion for promoting and developing tools to assist campuses with deployment of web-based student services. This interest in student services has lead to a partnership with the Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications (WCET). Recently, this partnership has produced a student service “audit tool”. The tool not only assists schools in identifying possible improvement areas within their web-based student services environment but also helps to identify possible strategies or functions for improvement within a particular service area. The audit was piloted in summer 2003 and was viewed as a success throughout the MnSCU system. For 2004, MnSCU and the WCET have further refined the tool with additional service categories. There are now twenty student services categories covered by the audit including:

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<tr>
<th>2003 Audit Areas</th>
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<tr>
<td>Financial aid</td>
<td>Student activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Schedule of classes</td>
<td>Assessment and testing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Course/program catalog</td>
<td>Placement services</td>
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<td>Student records</td>
<td>Personal counseling</td>
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<td>Student accounts</td>
<td>Technical support</td>
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<td>Registration</td>
<td>Bookstore</td>
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<td>Admissions</td>
<td>Library</td>
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<td>Communication to students</td>
<td>Tutoring</td>
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<td>Career counseling</td>
<td>Disability services</td>
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<td>Academic advising</td>
<td>International student services</td>
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The assessment of student learning is integrated into the systems assessment and effectiveness plan by incorporating four distinct areas:

1. Course Readiness Tool: Minnesota Online courses are offered by a number of different Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, which means that the opportunity exists for high variability in the design and structure of course web sites. Minnesota Online recommends an example of a rubric that can be used to assess student-readiness of course sites while allowing great flexibility in course content, methods, and delivery.
2. **Program Approval Process**: The policies, procedures and practices of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities program approval process apply to the systems online programs and degrees. These principles include:

- Manage online program policy development.
- Conduct program review and new program approval for online programs.
- Maintain online program inventory.
- Coordinate new online program approval with institutional approval to offer online programs.

3. **The Minnesota Online Peer Review Process**: The Minnesota Online Council manages an evaluation process and criteria to determine the college’s or university’s readiness to offer online degrees through a Peer Review Process. The purpose of the peer review process is to ensure and recognize quality and to observe firsthand the value of learning and interaction designed around distance education. The results of this process will be used to refine criteria and protocols for the future delivery methods of online learning and for communicating to external stakeholders that an established set of delivery standards is met.

4. **Minnesota Online Effectiveness**: The effectiveness component of the assessment plan for Minnesota Online was designed with the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities accountability scorecard in mind, which is serving the information needs that stakeholders have about the performance for online learners. Standards based assurances are desired and targeted by Minnesota Online. The following are areas within this component:

- Key Performance Indicators
- Data Reporting Tables
- Minnesota Online’s Portfolio Project ([mnonlineportfolio.project.mnscu.edu](http://mnonlineportfolio.project.mnscu.edu))
- Annual Report

II. **Learning Issues Addressed & Outcomes of the Presentation**

The experience in Minnesota offers some lessons learned relating to building a statewide system to provide distance education.

**Issues to be Addressed in the Session**

1. Strategic planning for the implementation
2. Changing roles within the system - autonomy vs interdependence
3. Commitment to local institutions vs the system as a whole
4. Directing resources - competitive vs collaborative
5. Lessons learned - Planning for a financial infrastructure in “hard times”
6. Keeping up with the rapid implementation of distance education services and operations
7. Balancing the control exercised within the system

**Presentation Objectives**

The objective of this session it to provoke discussion regarding the lessons learned necessary for advancing and facilitating the delivery of online education and services in a statewide network.