

## **More strategic approach needed in eLearning to raise degree attainment**

A panel of technology experts, who spoke with the Higher Education Coordinating Board and its Advisory Council March 18, said more strategic focus is needed to fully develop the potential of information technology among Washington's higher education institutions.

For example, panel members said, the state's higher education institutions will need to plan for, incorporate and expand eLearning more strategically to achieve the degree goals of the new Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education.

And additional information technology capacity, personnel, and professional development opportunities for faculty and staff will be needed to meet growing demand, especially from those placebound in under-served areas.

Making presentations to the Board were Bob Billings, Chief Information Officer of the Higher Education Coordinating Board; Cable Green, eLearning director for the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges;

and Muriel Oaks, dean of the Center of Distance and Professional Education at Washington State University.

Information technology infrastructure will play a foundational role in supporting the goals of the master plan, Billings said.

- It will help more people achieve degrees.
- It will support leading-edge scholarship and research.
- It will be used to track and analyze key performance indicators.

### **IT is all about people**

Information technology is 80 percent about people, 19 percent about infrastructure, and one percent magic, Billings said.

IT represents one of the largest annual institutional expenditures and is used to carry out every aspect of operations: admissions, registration, teaching & learning, accounting, facilities and security.

To achieve the full potential of information technology, institutions must view it as a tool, not a teacher; invest wisely in faculty as well as in infrastructure and support personnel;

and be mindful that technology is a means to an outcome, not an outcome in itself.

[Link to slide presentation.](#)

### **The 'e' in eLearning**

The 'e' in e-learning can stand variously for enhanced, electronic, or extended, said Cable Green. eLearning is about using digital technologies to support new ways of learning in new spaces.

Most importantly, Green said, eLearning is rapidly expanding higher education's capacity to deliver courses. In fall 2007, 3.5 million students (20 percent of all college students nationwide) were taking online courses.

Online enrollment is the fastest-growing sector in higher education. Online enrollment was up 15 percent among the state's community and technical colleges in fall 2007.

About 14,000 FTE – or 75 percent of the state's online enrollment – is carried out by the community and technical college system. Since 1998, the number of online courses being offered has grown 718 percent – from 373 to more than 18,000.

How do completion rates for online courses compare for those of classroom learning?

Green said the completion rate for online learners has traditionally been from five to eight percent below other students, but that recently, “those numbers flipped.”

[Link to slide presentation.](#)

### **Improved access, articulation, retention, completion**

Muriel Oaks said eLearning can help achieve the strategic plan goal of raising educational attainment by facilitating access, articulation, retention and completion in higher education.

eLearning will play a particularly important role in meeting the needs of placebound learners, campus students who require flexibility and students and faculty who want more blended course options, Oaks said.

It also will help ease the transition from high school to college and from the community colleges to the four-year institutions and improve retention among students who need improved access to required courses.

Preparing faculty to make full use of eLearning will involve help with course design, delivery, and maintenance. Greater levels of technology training and administrative oversight will be needed, as well.

[Link to slide presentation](#)

### **Planning for a more strategic approach to eLearning**

Responding to the panel presentations, Board and Advisory Council members emphasized that a better case needs to be made both to the Legislature and internally with faculty about the importance of investing strategically in eLearning.

“There is an interesting contrast between important operating advances that are needed and applications that may be viewed by some as far out,” said Earl Hale. The investment needed will be substantial, he said, and we need to define precisely what needs to be done.

Cable Green asked: “What should we be investing in? The question of funding is important. If the cost is too great, we won’t get it. But keep in mind that the entire investment in

information technology on one campus is less than the cost of one building.”

Ann Daley, executive director of the HECB, said the state needs to focus on a larger, more elegant solution to the challenge of educating more students to higher levels, one that encompasses eLearning, traditional campus development, branch campuses, university centers, and the community and technical colleges.

“What will be the impact of an explosion of eLearning on our campuses, students, faculty and resources? Campuses have been the place where education happens. Where does technology drive that place? We have to think carefully about these questions,” Daley said.

The Board’s continuing discussions on technology have reaffirmed that incredible changes are occurring rapidly in delivery formats and technology tools.

The role of technology and eLearning will have a big influence on how we develop a set of capital and technology recommendations for our higher education system this year, Daley said.

### **HECB to help facilitate agreement on site for UW North Campus**

During its 2008 session, the Washington State Legislature authorized programs to address system planning, alignment and efficiency in postsecondary education.

Two of several budget provisos provide funding for the Higher Education Coordinating Board to:

1. Work with communities north of Seattle to help them reach agreement on a site for the new **UW North Campus**; and
2. Prepare program and operating plans for a new **higher education center in Kitsap County**.

The site recommendation for UW North and the plan for the new higher education center are due to the Legislature in December 2008.

### **Strengthening transfer**

The Legislature also authorized the HECB to form work groups to conduct a series of transfer-related projects designed to strengthen support for students moving through the higher education system.

Among these are:

1. Develop a list of rights guaranteed to students who earn a transfer associate degree under a direct transfer agreement (September 2009);
2. Develop and implement a system for identifying the transferability and applicability of community and technical college courses to students' baccalaureate degree goals (September 2009);
3. Develop plans to monitor and regularly report the progress and success of transfer students (January 2009); and
4. Develop a detailed plan for a statewide Web-based academic planning tool (December 15, 2008)

### **Expanding workplace-based eLearning programs**

The WTECB and SBCTC are required to convene a work group that includes the HECB to review standards and best practices for workplace-based eLearning. A preliminary report is due Dec. 1, 2008, identifying barriers to success and recommending how student access can be increased. A final report is due Dec. 1, 2009.

### **Evaluating prior learning**

The HECB is required to convene a work group to assess current institutional practices regarding acceptance of prior learning credits and make a report by Dec. 1, 2008.

### **Building dual credit awareness**

OSPI is directed to compile information about dual credit options and programs for high school students and to place such information online. High schools are directed to make teachers and counselors aware of the college credit programs and to help students and parents find the information.

### **Performance agreements**

Performance agreements between the state and public four-year institutions will be pilot tested over a six-year period. The HECB will staff this effort.

The six-year agreements will encompass performance measures, degree production goals, level of resources, capital project prioritization and student outcomes.

Institutions are to develop initial draft agreements by September 1, 2008 for review by a state committee of four legislators and representatives of the

governor, OFM, OSPI and the HECB. Final draft agreements will be proposed by November 1, 2008.

### **New capital budget process**

The Legislature approved a new process for prioritizing capital budget requests in which OFM develops common definitions and a scoring system to be used for ranking project requests.

Staff from HECB and SBCTC will provide technical assistance in developing the scoring system.

Beginning in 2008, institutions will submit prioritized lists of projects requested within various categories: expanding access; upgrading or renovating existing facilities; and research.

### **Other legislative actions**

#### **Child care**

An increase in state funding from \$75,000 to \$500,000 annually for the baccalaureate sector, from \$50,000 to \$500,000 annually for the two-year colleges will support child care for students on or near campuses.

Grants for child care are to be distributed to the four-year institutions proportional to funds made available from student fees and private contributions.

#### **Campus safety plans**

Institutions are required to make available to students, faculty and staff a campus safety plan, conduct self-studies of their capacity to facilitate safety by October 1, 2008, and submit reports every two years to the HECB and SBCTC beginning December 31, 2010.

#### **Career, technical degrees**

The HECB and OSPI were directed to work with other state agencies to develop model career and technical education programs of study, including those leading to associate and bachelor's degrees.

#### **Health Professional Scholarship/Loan**

The Legislature increased the appropriation for the Health Professional Scholarship and Loan program by \$1.25 million to help expand the number of health care professionals serving the un-insured and under-served.

#### **E-Science Institute**

The Legislature provided \$1 million to establish an E-Science Institute at the University of Washington. The institute will provide infrastructure and consulting expertise to university researchers.

#### **Star Researchers**

The supplemental budget increased funding by \$265,000 for the Star Researchers program to recruit promising researchers to Washington to boost commercially viable research.

### **Legislature approves Strategic Master Plan**

The House and Senate passed a resolution approving the new 10-year Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education, which charts the course for future development of the state's higher education institutions.

The resolution strongly supports the central goal of substantially raising the level educational attainment among Washington citizens by increasing the number of degrees and certificates being earned and by expanding adult basic and workforce education.

The plan was developed in 2007 by the Higher Education Coordinating Board in collaboration with institutions, students, faculty policy makers, legislators, local and regional civic organizations and interested citizens.

Describing postsecondary education as the 'crowning jewel in our state's human capital development plan,' the resolution states it is the Legislature's intent to focus on achieving necessary levels of education needed 'to catapult Washington into global education leadership.'

### **HECB conducting capacity, technology study to determine how to meet future growth**

The HECB is conducting a study to determine how the degree and enrollment goals of the Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education can be met at the public and independent institutions.

The study will consider how existing program, technology, and facility capacity can be used to accommodate system growth; any additional capacities needed; and the operating and capital costs of those improvements.

The study includes three central components:

1. Determine the overall enrollment growth trajectory, the distribution of enrollments within that trajectory, and how best to assign enrollments to meet specific regional, demographic, or institutional needs.
2. Determine existing and needed capacity to address enrollment growth and degree goals.
3. Determine operating and capital resources needed to address goals.

[Read more](#)

### **Board approves new degree programs at Eastern and the University of Washington**

A Bachelor of Arts in Technical Communication at EWU received Board approval at the regular meeting on March 19, 2008.

The program will prepare students for a broad range of communication careers in fields such as computing, engineering, health care, law, economics and government.

A Bachelor of Arts in Biochemistry and a Master's and Ph.D. in Biology were approved at UW. [Read more](#)

### **Next HECB meeting set for May 21-22 at WSU Spokane**

The next regular meeting of the Higher Education Coordinating Board will be May 21 and 22 at the WSU Spokane Riverpoint Campus. Board meetings are open to the public.

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