Chapter 4
Planning and Implementing Online Programs:
A Case Study in the Graduate School of Education at the State University of New York at Buffalo

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study reviews the planning, development, and initial implementation of an online Master's of Library Science (MLS) degree program at a large public research university. The development process will be presented from both a school-based and a department-based perspective. A review of the literature found articles and books that address online programs in education and library science; however, the majority of those publications focus on either the experiences of students or the concerns of faculty members who deliver courses through distance education technologies. Very few of the resources address the full spectrum of planning, developing, and implementing an online program. We found that the MLS program development process greatly benefited from existing school-based policies and procedures, while some barriers and challenges were also encountered in the context of customizing those policies and procedures for the Library and Information Studies (LIS) department. We believe our experiences will inform practices at other institutions and departments considering initiating online programs.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

On May 11, 1846, "The University of Buffalo Charter" was granted by the New York State Legislature and the University began as a private institution with a medical school as its first academic unit. In 1962, the University transformed from a private institution to a public institution, merging with the State University of New York. Currently, the University at Buffalo (UB) is the largest and most comprehensive campus in the 64-campus State University of New York (SUNY) system. It is a member of the Association of American Universities (AAU) and is a comprehensive research-intensive public university. The Graduate School of Education (GSE) is one of thirteen schools and colleges at UB; LIS is one of four departments within GSE. The other departments are Learning and Instruction; Counseling, School and Educational Psychology; and Educational Leadership and Policy.

SETTING THE STAGE

As one of the 13 professional schools at UB, GSE has access to a number of centralized university information technology services; however, a centralized office for distance education does not exist.

In 2001, a special initiative to develop an online degree program was presented by the UB Provost's office. This initiative allowed the Dean of GSE, Dr. Mary Gresham, to create a new position, Director of New Media. UB hired Dr. Christine Kroll for this position, and Kroll led the initiative to offer UB's first fully online degree program: GSE's Master's of Education in General Education. The program launched in the fall of 2001, with the final student graduating from the program in the summer of 2009. Although the program was very successful, changes in New York State teacher certification requirements necessitated a program phase out as the program no longer met these new requirements.

In 2005, with the general education program phase out in progress, Dean Gresham made the decision to grow online programs within GSE. Specifically, she targeted the launch of five programs fully online within five years. To this end, Kroll who was now overseeing all educational technology initiatives in the school in the role of Assistant Dean for Educational Technology moved to a new position: Assistant Dean for Online Programs. An online programs coordinator was hired to manage the anticipated increase in student enrollment and a full-time instructional designer was assigned to Kroll to coach faculty through the transition from on-campus to online teaching.

Along with these school-based resources, the University has the following support for online initiatives:

1. The *Graduate School* is the liaison to SUNY and the New York State Education Department (NYSED); both agencies must approve UB's requests to offer degree programs online.
2. The University at Buffalo *Information Technology* group provides computing support for students and faculty, as well as video capture of on-campus courses that will eventually be taught online.
3. The *Teaching Learning Center* offers a variety of training workshops utilized primarily by the instructional designer who, in turn, provides one-on-one training to faculty.
4. The *Student Response Center* provides online and phone services for registration, billing, and financial aid.
5. The *University Libraries* provide vast online resources enabling students to complete all assignments, many of which are research-based and require access to peer-reviewed publications.

All aforementioned offices and personnel were in place prior to planning the online MLS program. This allowed the LIS department to interface with

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