

# Meaning of the Online Experience

## Observations and Recommendations

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This document presents a brief summary of the experiences and lessons learned from offering online courses at the University of San Francisco, along with recommendations as to ways to move forward. It is not a comprehensive history of online education and does not include comparisons with other schools.

### *Definitions and types of classes*

It is important to be clear as to what we are and are not addressing. “Online” means different things to different audiences, some of which are relevant to this discussion and some of which are not.

- **Online.** WSCUC defines an “online” course as one in which more than 50% of the course content is delivered in an online modality. For simplicity, we will use this definition within this document, recognizing that most online courses at USF have far greater than 50% online content. We would also distinguish between online *courses* and online *programs*, which are degree programs in which most or all of the content is delivered in an online format.
- **Hybrid.** Hybrid refers to a teaching modality in which much of the content is delivered online, but then complemented by intensives in which students meet face-to-face to apply or integrate the knowledge they’ve acquired in an online format. The DNP program is a nice example of this. For purposes of this discussion, we will assume that “hybrid” is a subset of “online”, so that hybrid courses must offer at least 50% of their content online. We feel that, in general, hybrid is the mode of teaching that is the best fit for our students, particularly our undergraduates.
- **Flipped.** A flipped class is one in which the traditional background or fundamental material is learned out of class, usually with the aid of technology or online materials, leaving the class to focus on applications of this knowledge. This is particularly effective with classes such as Math 106 that contain a skill-based component, such as proficiency in Excel. The skills can be provided in an online setting and practiced out of class, thereby freeing up class time for problem solving and discussion. Flipped classes are distinguished from hybrid or online classes in that the amount of seat time is the same in a flipped class as in a traditional class - only what is done during class time changes. While we are very excited about the potential of flipped classes, and encourage their exploration, they are not the focus of this document.

- **Low residency.** A low residency class is one in which the student is away from campus for the bulk of her education, typically engaged in an independent activity such as an internship or research project. She might use online technologies such as Skype, email or Zoom to coordinate with her instructor or advisor. Low residency classes offer great opportunities for students to live or study elsewhere, and potentially assist in retention, but are also not the focus of this document.

## **Background**

USF has been dabbling with online education, mostly, but not entirely, within the professional disciplines. There has been a great deal of interest from some innovative or entrepreneurial faculty, and several graduate-level programs developed. Initially, much of the development, recruiting and management of online degree programs was outsourced to companies such as Pearson Embanet. However, this arrangement presented challenges in terms of revenue sharing and strategic misalignment. As a result, in 2013 USF hired Carol Batker as Vice Provost for Online and Branch Campuses, with the goal of in-sourcing much of these efforts. Carol stepped down in Fall 2015, leaving the position vacant and strategic decisions to the schools and the College.

Meanwhile, there has been continued faculty interest in exploring online education. The university has offered brown bags, run incubators, and encouraged faculty to explore flipped and hybrid programs. These have been largely one-off efforts without much institutionalization.

## **ITS Support**

The Digital Education team within the Information Technology Services division is a 5 person centralized course design team responsible for working with tenured and adjunct faculty to build online and hybrid courses at USF. Formerly the Online Education Design team, the team was assembled in 2013 when the University decided to move online program development and management in-house. Until Fall 2015, the team worked closely with the Office of Online Education to vet all course development requests. Since then, the Digital Education team has worked directly with the Schools and the Office of Assessment and Accreditation as well as Vice Provost Jeff Hamrick to manage course development requests. For instance, Vice Provost Jeff Hamrick also implemented a change which required course development costs to be included in new program budgets.

Under the direction of Provost Jennifer Turpin, USF's initial intent was to introduce 2 new fully online programs a year commencing 2014. However, in 2015 and 2016 USF introduced 4 and 3 new programs respectively.

To date, all online and hybrid courses developed as part of a WSCUC approved program (with the exception of the Pearson Embanet MSN and MPA programs) have been developed in

partnership with the Digital Education team. However, there are numerous hybrid and online courses that have been developed independently of this team.

The Digital Education team's program of work has also expanded to include stand alone online and hybrid courses such as the College of Arts and Sciences' From Slavery to Obama and Portraits of Christ courses, as well as non-academic courses like the Board of Trustees New Member Orientation and the USF Employee Information Security Training. The team is also involved in discussion regarding expanding course development into continuing education and certificate programs.

To date, the Digital Education team has partnered with the Schools and divisional areas to develop 80 online and hybrid courses and introduce 8 new online and hybrid Master's programs, with an additional 15 courses and 2 hybrid programs coming online this Fall.

### **Challenge: Decision-making Structure and Oversight**

The biggest impediment to date in moving forward with online education in a coherent way is the lack of clear decision-making structure. Currently, curricular decisions about how or whether to pursue online courses or programs come from the deans, while resources related to instructional development lie within ITS, and enrollment and marketing efforts are handled through Strategic Enrollment Management. Deans have chosen to take a variety of approaches to online education, from aggressively launching programs to conservatively holding back. This has led to a lack of strategic focus, wasted resources, and general confusion about direction.

### **Challenge: Strategy**

A closely related problem is the need to define a coherent strategy around online education. This requires careful consideration of the reasons for developing online courses and programs to begin with.

- Is it to improve retention? If so, then we should focus on developing courses that help students stay on track, and allow them to take classes from home during summer and intersession.
- Is it to target new populations? If so, then we should do a careful analysis of the programs that appeal to these populations and the economic models that will allow these programs to succeed.
- Is it to reduce costs? We would strongly emphasize that, within USF's educational model, online courses are very expensive to develop and offer, so cost savings can be achieved more simply through other measures.
- Is it to increase revenue? If so, we need to be more strategic in identifying areas of strength that translate to an online setting.
- To improve space utilization? This would imply a focus on classes that serve a large number of students and also translate well to an online or hybrid setting.

Each of these reasons has assumptions tightly packed within, and need to be closely questioned.

Developing a coherent strategy will make the decisions around what and when to develop much clearer and more congruent and reduce the chances of wasting resources on the development and rollout of courses and programs with limited appeal.

We would suggest focusing on courses that are likely to be offered repeatedly, have high demand, and lend themselves well to an online or hybrid format. Core courses, as well as courses such as first-semester Spanish or business math that offer multiple sections every semester, seem like obvious candidates.

We would also suggest considering differential tuition, as well as the possibility of unbundling courses from degree programs at the graduate level and offering them as certificates. Currently we charge a single price for a course, with the argument that the learning experience is the same regardless of modality. It may be that this is not how it is perceived by potential students, and that there are opportunities to reach new markets by offering online or hybrid courses not-for-credit at a reduced price.

### **Challenge: Training and culture**

An important component of encouraging and developing online education at USF will be providing adequate training and promoting a culture around online pedagogy, much like we have around service-learning, which is deeply institutionalized at USF. Currently, we have a group of early adopters who are enthusiastic; institutional efforts are needed to engage a larger fraction of the faculty and staff.

This should include:

- Providing faculty with a better understanding of the possibilities and potential of online education, and helping them to realize that it's much more than just putting PowerPoint slides online. This might include publicizing exemplar classes, brownbag sessions highlighting innovations, or creating online orientations or tutorials.
- Training faculty to develop (or assist in developing) online lectures, assignments, and courses. The Digital Education team currently offers a training for all new faculty developing online and hybrid courses. It has proved to be very challenging to recruit faculty to carve time out of their schedules for this; incentives might prove helpful.
- Training faculty around online pedagogy. How should they structure their courses? How to engage students? How to promote thoughtful discussion? How to deal with cheating and plagiarism? The Digital Education team, as well as CTE, are already working on this, and could use further support.
- Promoting venues and resources that allow faculty and staff to share ideas, experiences and best practices around online education. For example, CTE will be sponsoring a Faculty Learning Community this fall around best practices for hybrid classes.

### **Challenge: Assessment**

USF is in need of a system to allow faculty and administrators to properly assess online and hybrid courses. This includes both student learning and course effectiveness. We would recommend pursuing Quality Matters (<http://www.qualitymatters.org>). Quality Matters is a widely adopted, research-backed peer review process which provides a rubric for assessing online courses, as well as training material to allow institutions to develop internal peer review processes for developing and assessing online courses.

### **Challenge: Accessibility**

Accessibility is a very important issue to consider when developing and offering online courses, and one that requires a different approach from on-ground classes. For on-ground classes, USF's approach to student accessibility issues is a reactive one; when a student requests an accommodation, Student Disability Services works with the student and faculty member on a case-by-case basis to determine a reasonable accommodation. This works great for on-ground classes, but may not be appropriate for online material, where going back and redoing material to address an accessibility concern may be very time-consuming and costly. In addition, it is a violation of the ADA, Section 508. We would instead recommend that USF incorporate accessibility into course design from the beginning, and develop a set of strategies for common accommodations. These would include:

- Ensuring that content can be properly read by screen readers.
- Providing captioning or subtitling for video material, along with a full running transcript.
- Ensuring that rich media content (such as interactive simulations or exercises) have adequate alternatives for students with visual impairments.

We also would recommend engaging with SDS to develop blanket policies and best practices for handling disabilities or learning differences, such as ADHD, within an online setting.

### **Challenge: Intellectual Property**

There are two separate issues to consider with respect to intellectual property: ownership of created material, and use of third-party media or material within a course.

The CBA is nebulous when it comes to ownership of faculty-created material. The language indicates that material created as part of a faculty member's normal duties is jointly owned, but how this is implemented in an online class is not clear. For example:

- Can a faculty member use this material outside of USF? If so, where? Are there constraints on this?
- Can USF use the material without the faculty member's consent? For example, could another faculty member teach this class, even if there is material using the first faculty member's likeness?

- Developing an online course is a significant amount of work. If faculty receive extra compensation for this, does that change the nature of ownership?

We would recommend developing clear guidelines around this for all faculty teaching online.

The other issue involving IP is the use of third-party material within an online class. We have learned through the distribution of [From Slavery to Obama](#) that vetting course material, finding the origin of an image, acquiring rights, and ensuring that we are in compliance is an extremely time-consuming process. The following steps will help to mitigate this.

- We need concrete advice from an attorney with experience in copyright and intellectual property about fair use and the DMCA. We do not have a clear understanding of when third-party media can and cannot be used, what our rights are, and what steps we should take to prevent either a takedown notice or a lawsuit.
- We need to then develop a clear policy and train faculty and course designers around this policy. Last year, under the direction of Dean Tyrone Cannon, Donna Ferrullo drafted such a policy for us; its current status is unclear.
- We may want to contract with a person or service that can track down the provenance of images, ensure that we are in compliance, and secure rights if necessary. Currently this is being done in an ad hoc fashion.

### **Challenge: Implementation**

Currently, implementing an online course or program is more challenging than it needs to be. Part of this is due to the lack of structure and coordination. The Digital Education team in ITS receives inquiries and requests from faculty throughout the schools and colleges, as well as from the deans, with little guidance as to priority. Budget for program development then needs to be identified, market research conducted, and the NCAP process completed, leading to delays and frustrations. In order to get around this, some faculty “go rogue” and develop their own material. While this saves time and money, and can be a perfectly appropriate strategy in some cases, it also has the potential to create issues with accessibility, using best practices, and intellectual property. Setting a strategic direction for online learning that clearly articulates the problems online is meant to solve will help greatly in this area. Clearer oversight of online education is also essential.

### **Recommendations**

In summary, our key recommendations are:

- Develop a clear strategy for online learning that identifies specific problems or challenges that it addresses.
- Implement a clear decision-making structure around online education.
- Devote high-cost resources such as instructional designers to courses that are likely to have a significant ROI, such as Core classes.
- Develop a training program to educate faculty about online education, including incentives.

- Continue to develop a culture of online learning, including support and publicity of activities such as the CTE learning community.
- Purchase Quality Matters and develop a community of faculty who are trained with the system and able to assess others' classes.
- Develop clear policies around accessibility, ownership of intellectual property, and use of third-party materials.

## **Appendix: Current online offerings at USF**

### *CAS*

Arts and Sciences has taken a conservative approach to online education. The College has held a number of incubators, brown bags, and other semi-formal groups to encourage faculty to explore this space. The college has also developed the following online courses and programs:

- THRS 220: Portraits of Christ. This is a fully online Core course. Originally intended for use at the branch campuses, it provides a model for how we might offer Core or other heavily-enrolled classes in an online or hybrid format.
- From Slavery to Obama. This course was developed by Clarence B. Jones, Diversity Visiting Professor and Scholar, and has been offered in online and hybrid formats. Dr. Jones is exploring ways to use the content with HBCUs and high schools. It provides one model for how online content might be used outside of USF, as well as a test case for challenges with accessibility and IP.
- Master's in Collegiate Athletics. This was a fully online Master's degree program. It was closed in Fall 2015 and is currently being taught out. It provides a cautionary example of the challenges of creating online programs; there was a large sunk cost in developing courses, but the demand did not meet expectations.
- Master's in Professional Communications. This program is launching in Fall 2016. They are planning to offer at least some of their courses in a hybrid format.

### *SONHP*

The School of Nursing and Health Professions (SONHP) offers a variety of fully online programs and courses. For all of our programs offered either fully online or hybrid, state regulations are highly considered. We follow the University's guidelines and concentrate mostly on nine states across the nation. Currently, the following statement is listed on our websites for all programs who have an online presence and it is updated as the state statutes and regulations change:

USF is not currently accepting applications from online students who reside in Alabama\*, Arkansas\*, Delaware, Iowa\*, Kentucky, Maryland\*, Minnesota, New Mexico, North Carolina\*, Ohio (MPH, MSIM) and Wisconsin\*. Additionally, USF is not currently accepting applications for online students for the MSN and DNP online programs who reside in Louisiana, Maine, New York, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Rhode Island and

Tennessee. Note, residents of states where USF is not authorized for online education may attend USF courses and programs at any of our California based campuses.

*\*States with asterisks (\*) are states where USF does not intend on seeking authorization.*

The **RN/MSN Online Program** was the first fully online program launched Spring 2012. The program was launched with the partnership of Embanet-Compass which is now Pearson-Embanet. This program was chosen in part because it is a post-licensure degree and also due to the emerging role of the Clinical Nurse Leader (CNL). The program is very flexible and is very popular with working nursing professionals. It is rated among the top in the country. It comprises of 35 credits for RNs with a BSN and 46 credits for RNs with an ADN. Students can complete this program over the course of two years of study. It is designed with a fully comprehensive schedule of classroom and online instruction plus practicum coursework.

The **Masters in Health Informatics** was originally designed to be a fully online program but has since been redesigned as a hybrid program. This degree is a response to the transformation in healthcare that is happening due to the vast development in information technology. The program comprises of 36-credits to be completed during two years of full time graduate status. The program is designed to meet students' needs with demanding career and personal commitments who wish to extend their graduate education. This program prepare specialists in the innovative field of health informatics. Graduates are prepared to be world class innovators in the 21st century digital revolution.

Just approved for Fall 2016, is a stand alone master certificate program. The certificate requires students to complete any four courses among the regular graduate level health informatics (HS) courses. Other courses in the SONHP that are relevant to the student's specific goals and interests in health and biomedical informatics may be used as well, but until students are actually admitted.

The **DNP Completion Program** was slated to offer a section fully online as of 2016, but has since been redesigned to be offered in a hybrid format. The program is designed for registered nurses with any master's degree and is very responsive to the needs of working professionals. All of the course contents are designed in a modular format that allows for online instruction with a combined attendance in a traditional brick and mortar school with direct instruction by faculty members. The modules assigned during a face to face encounter can be used as a flipped classroom even though it was initially designed for online instruction. This design allows for flexibility in the course content delivery. The DNP students attend classes online and also on teaching weekends (Specific Friday evenings and Saturdays). Integrated with the in-person sessions are online instruction modules that extends the scope, depth and impact of the real time interaction.

The program of study for students with a bachelor's degree is 96 credits. The DNP completion for nurses who have completed a master's degree takes into account previous academic



coursework and clinical experiences and the required number of credits are adjusted accordingly. The course schedules are designed for both fulltime and parttime students as a response to the needs of the working nurse professional. In addition, the DNP completion student must complete a total 1000 clinical hours during the program and can be completed in their home state as long as that state is one of the approved state where we are eligible to conduct business.

The **Master of Science in Healthcare Simulation** is an emerging approach to educating and training professionals. It is offered online with an in-person conference once a semester in San Francisco. It is designed for all applicants who hold a Baccalaureate degree, regardless of major. It is a two year master's degree offering educational theory, research methodology and financial management strategies to prepare students for future leadership in simulation-related careers.

Approved for Fall 2016, are two stand alone certificate programs: Simulation in Education and Simulation Management/Leadership. An applicant must be qualified for entry into the masters program to be considered for the certificate. Each certificate requires the student to complete 3 courses plus 90 hours of practicum. All courses are transferrable into the masters program should they wish to continue for their masters.

The **Master of Public Health (MPH)** is an interdisciplinary graduate level program recently offered online as well as on ground. The program's goal is to educate individuals for professional careers in public health. This high-quality program focuses on identifying core competencies in public health using innovative and effective pedagogy (e.g. Ignatian Pedagogy).

The program requires a minimum of 45 credits, which should include public health fieldwork internship experience. The MPH students have the opportunity to gain meaningful real world practice across the nation and the globe. In place of a research based thesis, the students produce an original graduate project based on the culmination of their classroom learning, a 300 hour fieldwork internship, and a capstone synthesis that demonstrates mastery of the profession.

## *SOM*

The School of Management (SOM) offers a variety of fully online courses. Online courses are popular among our students who are working professionals. The format allows students the flexibility to complete coursework at their own pace around their work schedules. Students tend to be mature and are able to work together and with their faculty online to complete the course without the in-class faculty monitoring typical of on-the-ground classes.

The list below includes only fully online courses that were taught since Fall, 2014. There are additional hybrid courses which are not listed here.

Fully online courses are offered in the following programs:

- BSM: Bachelors of Science in Management is a degree completion program for working professionals. Courses in the program are taught in our branch campuses and consist of on-the-ground courses, hybrid courses and fully online courses. Courses in this program are designated "BSM"

- MPA: Master of Public Administration. This program is entirely online and students in this program are also working professionals. Courses in this program are designated "PA".

- BSM 314 "Internet Data Sources" (also cross listed in the Economics Dept. and offered for the first time in Spring 2016 to our traditional BSBA students)
- BSM 499 "Special Topics: Business Communication & Decision-making"
- BSM 499 "Special Topics: Big Data Insights"
- MPA 611 "Public Administration as a Field and Practice in Contemporary Society"
- MPA 613 "Management and Organizational Theory"
- MPA 620 "Leadership Ethics"
- MPA 623 "Economics and Finance for Public Managers"
- MPA 632 "Public Policy Analysis"
- MPA 633 "Public Sector Budgeting"
- MPA 636 "Human Resource Planning and Management"
- MPA 638 "Emerging Technologies for Public Managers"
- MPA 644 "Strategic Planning and Communication"
- MPA 650 "Integrative Seminar"
- MPA 670 "Quantitative Methods"
- MPA 680 "Program Evaluation"
- MPA 685 "Strategic Management of Communication"

## SOE

The School of Education has only dipped its toes into the world of online education. About 8 years ago the school's Chairs Committee decided that courses that were over 30% online needed to submit a proposal to the Curriculum Committee to approve the proposed hybrid implementation of the course. No proposals have been brought to the Curriculum Committee and currently most faculty are unaware of this decision. The school did conduct a short series of conversations around the issue of technology and online courses during the Fall 2013 semester. Aside from that short series of conversations nothing further has been formed to explore these issues. The school has developed the following online courses and programs:

- Master's in TESOL (Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages). This was a fully online Master's degree program. It ran for approximately 4 years and is currently being taught out. The program started in Spring 2013 and since then has served 70 students, 40 of which have already graduated. For a variety of reasons the TESOL

program thinks the total number of students served could have and should have been much higher.

- Master's in DTTL (Digital Technologies for Teaching and Learning). This was a fully online Master's degree program that began in August 2015 and was closed in November 2015. It is currently being taught out. The first cohort of students in the program was 6. It was communicated that cohorts of 20-to-30 per year would be needed for the program to be self-sustaining. The DTTL program plans on continuing to offer a simultaneous online section, in addition to on-ground section, of all its courses as this provides doctoral and masters students in other programs attractive elective courses to take.

### *Law*

The School of Law's foray into online education has primarily been through the introduction of the LLM in Taxation (for lawyers) and Master of Legal Studies in Taxation programs (for non-lawyers), launched in Fall 2015. Courses across these programs are largely identical and have cross-enrollment. This Fall, these programs will offer their first hybrid course offerings as part of this program.

In addition to USF Master students, JDs, JD MBAs, non-Taxation LLM students, JDs from other Bay Area Law Schools and nation-wide employees of Andersen Tax enroll in these courses. The Schools of Law's partnership with Andersen Tax is seen as prestigious and an example of how USF can partner with local business to offer continuing education and certificate programs. In addition to the relationship with Andersen Tax, the Tax LLM program is pursuing partnerships with other tax firms.

The School also has a couple of stand-alone online and hybrid courses they have developed including a credit/no-credit offering of Advanced Legal Research and are interested in developing more.