

## **Online learning key to expanding access in the next decade**

Online learning, or e-learning as it is often called, has great potential to increase access to public and private baccalaureate institutions in the next decade, says Ray Schroeder, director of the Office of Technology-Enhanced Learning at the University of Illinois, Springfield (UIS).

Schroeder has been visiting with higher education administrators, faculty and staff this winter as part of an effort to help develop a new national online learning consortium to serve small and mid-sized colleges and universities.

He spoke with Higher Education Coordinating Board chairman Bill Grinstein, and agency staff members Monday, February 25. One of the nation's leading online learning experts, Schroeder also is scheduled to make a presentation to the Board at the May 21 work session in Spokane.

Schroeder said colleges and universities that do not fully embrace e-learning may not have the educational tools they need

to attract today's students, who respond better to more integrated and collaborative learning environments.

In 2007, UIS received the Excellence in Institution-Wide Online Teaching and Learning Programming Award from the Sloan Consortium, a group of institutions and organizations committed to quality online education.

### **One in five students takes at least one online course**

Nearly one in five higher education students now takes at least one class online, according to an October 2007 Sloan Consortium survey of more than 2,500 colleges and universities nationwide. The survey revealed that online enrollment rose by nearly 10 percent in fall 2006, to 3.49 million students.

Institutions with healthy online learning programs don't necessarily generate additional revenue, but neither do they incur additional costs, Schroeder said. Rather, e-learning is largely a break-even proposition.

On some overcrowded campuses, online courses can help reduce peak classroom demand among residential



*Ray Schroeder of the University of Illinois, Springfield meets with Pam Mead, HECB director of fiscal policy, David Mitchell, HECB network/database administrator.*

or commuting students. But the greatest benefit of online learning lies outside the traditional boundary lines – in expanding access regionally and nationally.

### **UIS reversed enrollment drop**

UIS reversed a trend of declining enrollments by engaging and supporting mainstream faculty at the department level to develop online classes.

Initially, UIS provided \$6,000 stipends for course development, but universities have been able to reduce this substantially because the technology to develop online courses is now widespread.



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Many faculty have reported their interaction with students increases when they teach courses online, Schroeder said.

UIS now offers more than 16 degree programs with more than 1,200 online majors. Nearly a quarter of all enrollments at UIS (24.4 percent) are online, and 52 percent of UIS students took at least one online course this spring.

Online education is price sensitive, Schroeder said. Set the price too high – more than about \$250 to \$300 per credit – and students will seek alternatives.

### **New Century Learning Consortium**

Schroeder said there is evidence to suggest that many mid-enrollment institutions – those with from 5,000 to 12,000 students – are experiencing enrollment declines.

Many of these institutions have been slow to adopt e-learning, he said and may be able to offset continued declines by offering more courses online to a wider audience. Institutions

simply have to adopt a more global approach by seeking opportunity where it exists, he said. Offering courses in conjunction with regional community college systems and filling other educational niches are two ways of developing new markets. This spring, Schroeder and Burks Oakley, founding director of the University of Illinois Online, are meeting with administrators, faculty members, and staff at each of six small-to-mid-sized colleges being considered as charter members of the New Century Learning Consortium (NCLC).

Supported by the Sloan Foundation, the NCLC will assist other, similar institutions with the implementation of high-quality, large-scale online and blended learning programs.

For more information on Sloan C:  
<http://sloan-c.org>

For information on the UIS program:  
<http://online.uis.edu/info/>

For information on Ray Schroeder:  
<http://rayschroeder.googlepages.com>

### **College Board cites growing interest in net price posting**

The U.S. Congress continues to express interest in requiring colleges and universities to report their average per-student net price, College Board officials said in Olympia recently.

Net price reflects the average price students pay after all student subsidies are factored. Net prices are lower than posted prices and have grown more slowly in the last decade.

Proponents of net price disclosure have argued that tracking the national average per-student net price more accurately reflects the true cost of a college education.

However, many colleges and universities are reluctant to post their net prices because they are sensitive about disclosing how they distribute costs.

Sandy Baum, senior policy analyst for the College Board and professor of economics at Skidmore College said the government might create an annual list