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## **Basic Principles of the CSUN Approach to Crafting Online Degree and Certificate Programs**

CSUN has created a distance learning unit (DL) in the university's Tseng College: *Graduate, International, and MidCareer Education* (Tseng College) that is responsible for working with faculty for the production, revision, and ongoing support of fully online degree and certificate programs whether they are funded from the General Fund or through self-support funding.

CSUN does not see excellence in online teaching and learning as primarily an issues of technology, though thoughtful and effective use of the tools offered by technology is a component of achieving excellence. Rather, for CSUN, excellence in online degree and certificate programs is based solidly on the same issues and principles that make face-to-face programs excellent and distinctive – the excellence of CSUN's faculty; the care taken by the faculty in the crafting of the curriculum and continuously improving the curriculum (in light of insights gained through assessment, changes in the fields/disciplines in question, possibilities presented by model national and international forefront programs in the fields/disciplines in question, and changes in the realities of professional practice in the fields/disciplines in question) to provide meaningful educational experiences that lead to high levels of student achievement; the best use of available resources and instructional options to foster student engagement and success in terms of on-time graduation and career beyond graduation; the commitment of CSUN faculty to instructional excellence and purposeful innovation in instructional strategies; the educational relationship between the students and the faculty; the commitment of the faculty and the university to support student success; and the university support of the efforts of the faculty (which for CSUN online degree and certificate programs is provided by the university through its Tseng College that works collaboratively with other CSUN academic colleges and administrative units).

CSUN online degree and credit certificate programs are subject to all the same CSU and CSUN academic standards, policies and process (including academic approvals and program review/assessment) as any face-to-face CSUN program. Departmental and faculty responsibility for the curriculum is the same for both face-to-face and online degree and credit certificate programs. CSUN online degree and credit certificate programs are subject to all WASC standards and the standards of any special accreditors relevant to the program in question as would be the case for any CSUN face-to-face programs in the fields/disciplines in question. Students in CSUN online degree and credit certificate programs are subject to all CSU and CSUN policies governing academic honesty, conduct, grades, and grade appeals as are students in CSUN face-to-face programs.

Academic decisions about whether or not a single discipline CSUN degree or credit certificate programs should be offered online are made by CSUN's academic department and its faculty for single discipline programs. The decision to go forward is

made in consultation with the dean of the CSUN academic college in which the department in question resides. Academic decisions about whether or not multidisciplinary CSUN degree or credit certificate programs should be offered online are made by the academic college(s) in which the academic components of the program reside with each department contributing a course(s) to the multidisciplinary program in question making the decision about whether or not the departmental course(s) in question should or should not be offered online as a component of a given CSUN multidisciplinary program.

DL in the Tseng College has a staff of instructional designers prepared in instructional design and related fields (human factors, educational technology, curriculum and instruction, and the like) at the masters or doctoral levels. DL also has a staff of technical specialists prepared at the masters or baccalaureate levels in computer sciences or a related technical field. All of these staff members have experience (some more than 10 years of experience) working with faculty in the production and support phases of CSUN's online degree and certificate programs.

CSUN online degree and certificate programs are offered in a cohort format with an integrated curriculum in which one course builds upon another with a focus on making the program in question an excellent and distinctive educational experience designed to help those enrolled achieve significant learning outcomes at both the course and program level.

For CSUN online degree and certificate programs, the university does not assume that the best approach is to assume that crafting a strong online program is to try and put the structure and strategy of a face-to-face course online. Rather, CSUN assumes that crafting a strong online course and, in turn, a successful online program requires a reconsideration of each course in light of the distinctive teaching and learning capacities offered by the online learning environment. In that light, CSUN supports each faculty member (with time and compensation) who will be teaching in a CSUN online degree or certificate program though the process of exploring the online options and possibilities that are right for the program in question, the course in question, and the instructional style/preferences of the faculty member in question.

Members of the CSUN DL instructional design staff work individually with each faculty member who will be teaching in a CSUN online degree or certificate program to explore the options and possibilities afforded by the online educational environment broadly considered. The goal is to both prepare the faculty member in question to teach online and to help that faculty member craft an online course that is his/her own in terms of focus on achieving the learning outcomes, presenting materials as each individual faculty member feels is most appropriate for the course in question, choosing ways to engage students that each deems appropriate to achieve the desired educational dynamic, designing assignments, and choosing instructional strategies and tools that work best for each.

CSUN approaches the relationship between each faculty member and his/her course for its online degree and certificate programs as it does for its face-to-face programs. That is, if a different faculty member is assigned to teach a given course in a CSUN online

degree or credit certificate program, he/she will be supported in the crafting of her/his course in the same way as was the prior faculty member teaching the course in question. That is, CSUN does not create “template” online courses that various instructors are expected to teach. Rather CSUN is committed to working through its Tseng College to ensure that all CSUN online degree and certificate programs provide those enrolled with a true CSUN educational experience rooted in educational relationships between each distinctive and accomplished CSUN faculty member and a given group of students in the specific course and program in question.

CSUN through DL in its Tseng College provides a two-week orientation and training program for students who enroll in CSUN online degree or certificate programs to prepare students for success in the online educational environment in general and for success in the specific online program in which each has enrolled. Further, CSUN through DL and the student support program managers/coordinators in its Tseng College provide comprehensive and ongoing student support from the start to the finish of each cohort.

CSUN’s Tseng College and its DL instructional design staff and technical team works with each faculty member teaching in a CSUN online degree or certificate program to craft and support a course that is educationally robust in terms of achieving high levels of student success in keeping with CSUN’s principles outlined above that guide online degree and certificate programs. Currently, on-time graduation rates in CSUN online degree and certificate programs range from a low of 63% to a high of 100% with most programs achieving on-time graduation rate percentages in the range between the high seventies and the low to mid-nineties.