

Distance Education Preliminary Self-Review

Stanislaus State
September 6, 2018

Self-Review Executive Summary

Stanislaus State conducted a self-review of its six WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC)-approved distance education programs, including Master of Social Work (MSW), Master of Business Administration (MBA), Nursing – RN to BSN, Gender Studies (BA), History (BA), and Communication Studies (BA) (the latter two were grandfathered by WSCUC prior to the current distance education policy). Social Work, Business Administration, Nursing, and Gender Studies offer online programs (MSW being hybrid), and History and Communication Studies offer instructional televised programs meeting the distance education definition. The self-review included examination of its programs, using the WSCUC Distance Education Review Team Report Appendix template as a guide, and compared programs to their traditional face-to-face counterparts where applicable. This self-review report is considered preliminary; still to be examined fall 2018 are additional data comparing, in aggregate, receiving students (those participating in the course at the site receiving the televised broadcast) and broadcast students (those participating in the course at the site being broadcast).

Reflecting on this preliminary self-review of distance education programs has allowed identification areas of strength, which include:

- Alignment with University's mission, especially in terms of student access to degree completion.
- Departmental faculty involvement in curriculum development and program coordination.
- Mirroring of content with face-to-face content in all program offerings.
- Instruction provided by full-time faculty (many of whom are tenure-line) who also teach face-to-face courses, in the majority of course offerings.
- Similar student success outcomes between online and traditional instruction.

The self-review has also allowed us to identify areas for growth and improvement, which include:

- Increased institutionalized support for recruitment, outreach, and assessment of stateside programs.
- Increased instructional technology (IT) staffing and technological capacity at both the Turlock and Stockton sites to maintain functionality, as well as expand services and offerings.
- Development of a cohesive assessment approach to distance education.

***Fit with Mission.* How does the institution conceive of distance learning relative to its mission, operations, and administrative structure? How are distance education offerings planned, funded, and operationalized?**

The purpose of distance learning at Stanislaus State is, in keeping with the University's mission, to serve as a mechanism to provide student-centered, accessible educational options to a diverse student body, including underrepresented groups, contribute to educational opportunities in the region, and partner with local communities. Distance education offerings also increases accessibility by freeing up classroom space for more face-to-face offerings.

All of the programs that offer distance learning report that their offerings intentionally mirror content provided in face-to-face versions of their courses to accommodate the needs of students who cannot always or consistently be on campus, and to provide these students with the same quality of education. In particular, distance education is seen as a way of ensuring degree completion programs are available and accessible to students at the Stockton Center.

The two fully online programs (RN-BSN and OMBA) and MSW hybrid program each have a director or coordinator in their respective departments, working in conjunction with the University Extended Education Office, and funded through student fees paid to UEE. Program directors/coordinators are responsible for oversight of logistics, curriculum, advising, and outreach. The televised and/or online distance education offerings in Communications Studies, Gender Studies, and History are degree completion options funded through stateside instructional funds and are planned and coordinated within the respective departments.

UEE funded programs offer greater flexibility and accessibility in terms of time and location, as well as support for recruitment and outreach, but have a higher cost associated with them than stateside programs. Stateside programs could benefit from increased institutionalized support for recruitment, outreach, and assessment.

***Connection to the Institution.* How are distance education students integrated into the life and culture of the institution?**

Program directors, coordinators, and instructors play an essential role in helping UEE online program students integrate into Stanislaus State's life and culture by providing in-depth New Student Orientations, advising, and other relevant information electronically and/or in person, as appropriate. These students also have access to campus resources, including the Library, Tutoring, and the Center for Excellence in Graduate Education (CEGE). Undergraduate online programs have the option of taking the Writing Proficiency Screening Test (required to enroll in an upper division Writing Proficiency course required for graduation) utilizing ProctorU, an online proctoring service, rather than taking the exam in person. Additionally, distance education students have the opportunity to participate in the University's commencement ceremony.

It appears that most students in stateside programs take a combination of distance education and face-to-face course offerings to complete their degrees, and thus are not isolated from the life and culture of the University. All students in stateside programs are required to attend a New Student Orientation in person, through which they are familiarized with campus resources and activities to which they have access. Stockton Center students who take televised courses have access to all of the resources available at the site, including Academic Advising, Career Services, Library services, the Writing Center, Enrollment Services, Financial Aid, and the Student Lounge.

As distance education offerings increase, a coordinated and holistic approach to increased electronic access to university resources is becoming increasingly important. As called for in the University's new Strategic Plan 2017-2025, the University is increasing access to other aspects of the life and culture of the institution, as well, through the integration of technology. For example, through more use of livestreaming and filming (for web-based archiving), students have increased access to meetings, events, and activities such as the University's Social Justice Conference, strategic planning open forums, General Education open forums, and the University President's addresses.

Quality of the DE Infrastructure. Are the learning platform and academic infrastructure of the site conducive to learning and interaction between faculty and students and among students? Is the technology adequately supported? Are there back-ups?

Blackboard and, to a lesser extent, Moodle are the Learning Management Systems (LMS) currently used for online and hybrid course offerings. Both are adequately supported and provide opportunities for a variety of interactions among faculty and students through discussion boards, imbedded wikis and blogs, and web-conferencing programs. Blackboard is backed up regularly. The Learning Services staff in the Office of Information Technology (OIT) are well-informed, supportive and offer a variety of group and individualized training opportunities for faculty and students. Blackboard, along with the TurnItIn feature, allow for online submission of assignments, as well as verbal and written assessment and feedback. The OIT Technology Support desk is available, in person and via phone or email, to help address immediate technology support needs.

The infrastructure for televised course offerings at the Stockton Center is also adequately supported. It allows for two-way, real time interaction between the instructor and Stockton students, as well as between students in Turlock and Stockton classrooms. Materials that cannot be posted on Blackboard (such as exams) can be scanned and sent to staff in Stockton at the beginning of the class period.

While programs report adequate support of the current distance education infrastructure, increased IT staffing and technological capacity will be needed at both the Turlock and Stockton sites to maintain functionality, as well as expand services and offerings. To help address this

need, a new Academic Technology Director is being established during the 2018/19 academic year.

Student Support Services: What is the institution's capacity for providing advising, counseling, library, computing services, academic support and other services appropriate to distance modality? What do data show about the effectiveness of the services?

Distance education students have access to all of the academic-related campus support resources at both the Stockton and Turlock sites that students taking face-to-face classes have. These include advising, counseling, library, computing services, academic support, and disability resources (note that the OMBA program students do not pay fees that avail them access to onsite resources such as the Student Health Center). As previously mentioned, most students in stateside programs take a combination of face-to-face and televised and/or online courses in Turlock and Stockton, and are able to utilize in-person as well as electronic services. Students in fully online programs are supported by their respective faculty coordinators and can also avail themselves of existing electronic resources.

Areas of improvement include increasing the availability of evening and weekend technological and library assistance, adding more electronic services, such as online submission of Enrollment Services forms, and providing more training to staff and faculty to use web-conferencing tools for advising, psychological counseling, and academic support services.

Faculty. Who teaches the courses, e.g., full-time, part-time, adjunct? Do they teach only online courses? In what ways does the institution ensure that distance learning faculty are oriented, supported, and integrated appropriately into the academic life of the institution? How are faculty involved in curriculum development and assessment of student learning? How are faculty trained and supported to teach in this modality?

A substantial majority of distance education courses are taught by full-time faculty (many of whom are tenure-line) who also teach face-to-face courses. Some courses are taught by part-time instructors, who also teach face-to-face courses. As a result, these faculty members are oriented, supported, and integrated into the academic life of the institution in the same way that faculty who only teach face-to-face courses are. Because all of the programs that offer distance learning intentionally mirror the content provided in face-to-face versions of their courses, most faculty who teach the distance versions also participate in curriculum development and assessment with their departmental colleagues. The few part-time instructors who teach only online are monitored and supported by their respective program coordinators or department chairs through introductions to OIT staff, online meetings, and email exchanges.

Faculty in both fully online UEE programs (OMBA and RN-BSN) are required to complete training and certification in online instruction (OMBA faculty take Online Learning Consortium –

OLC certification training, and RN-BSN faculty take Quality Matters – QM training). Faculty who teach online courses in stateside degree completion programs are encouraged, though not necessarily required, to participate in Quality Online Learning and Teaching (QOLT) and/or QM training, and in some cases, financial support is available for them to do so. The Office of Information Technology, in conjunction with the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, offers workshops every semester on a variety of topics, including Blackboard support and online teaching, and related topics. Faculty, including those who teach televised courses, also have access to the campus Multimedia and Instructional Design Services, as well as the University's website on best practices in online teaching.

Curriculum and Delivery. Who designs the distance education programs and courses? How are they approved and evaluated? Are the programs and courses comparable in content, outcomes and quality to on-ground offerings? (Submit credit hour report.)

All of the programs that offer distance learning courses intentionally mirror content provided in face-to-face versions of their courses, and are designed to generate the same outcomes and quality as face-to-face, on-ground offerings. Thus, the programs and courses are designed by faculty who have been involved in the development of and/or teach in the corresponding on-ground offerings. They are also approved and evaluated in the same way – through the University's curriculum approval and evaluation processes. Both fully online programs have been accredited by their respective accreditation agencies (CCNE for the RN-BSN program and AACSB for the OMBA).

Retention and Graduation. What data on retention and graduation are collected on students taking online courses and programs? What do these data show? What disparities are evident? Are rates comparable to on-ground programs and to other institutions' online offerings? If any concerns exist, how are these being addressed?

Retention and graduation rates are collected for both the fully-online UEE programs (OMBA and RN-BSN) and the corresponding face-to-face programs. The data are extracted by admit term cohorts. Because the fully-online programs are newer, fewer cohorts have completed entire programs compared with the parallel face-to-face programs. Comparisons of the data from both face-to-face programs and data from the fully-online RN-BSN, the OMBA and the Hybrid MSW (HMSW) show that in nearly every admit term cohort, students in the fully-online and hybrid programs perform the same or better than students in the face-to-face programs. When the data are taken, on average over the life of the program, degree completion (Fig. 1), time to degree (Fig 2), and graduation rates (Fig.3) are nearly identical, with some online cohorts performing better than the face-to-face cohorts.

Student Learning. How does the institution assess student learning for online programs and courses? Is this process comparable to that used in on-ground courses? What are the results of student learning assessment? How do these compare with learning results of on-ground students, if applicable, or with other online offerings?

In all cases, student learning in distance education offerings is assessed in the same way that on-ground courses are, and this assessment is based on evaluating student achievement in terms of course objectives and student learning outcomes. Available data indicate that student outcomes are similar between online and face-to-face instruction. Importantly, data are limited because these programs have only recently been implemented. Development of a cohesive assessment approach to distance education, such as the Assurance of Learning process utilized by the OMBA program, is a logical next step as these programs become more firmly established.

Contracts with Vendors. Are there any arrangements with outside vendors concerning the infrastructure, delivery, development, or instruction of courses? If so, do these comport with the policy on *Contracts with Unaccredited Organizations*?

NA

Quality Assurance Processes: How are the institution's quality assurance processes designed or modified to cover distance education? What evidence is provided that distance education programs and courses are educationally effective?

As content of distance education offerings mirrors that of on-ground courses, quality assurance processes are similar. These processes include the Academic Program Review (APR) cycle, evaluation of faculty, RPT practices, and temporary faculty evaluation. Both of the UEE fully online programs undergo review by their respective accreditation agencies. In the case of the MSW hybrid program, ongoing program evaluation and engaged discussions around online teaching and learning have resulted in more of the department's face-to-face classes developing into "flipped" classrooms, where technology (i.e., more materials made available via Blackboard or Moodle postings, increased use of online discussions, incorporation of VoiceThread and electronic journaling, etc.) allows the focus of "in class" time to be transformed. In other words, effective distance education strategies are informing face-to-face instruction in becoming less "faculty focused" (lecture-based) and more "student centered" (engaged teaching and learning).

Comparison of characteristics of online and face-to-face graduate programs retention and graduation rates.

Summary.

Students in online programs at Stanislaus State do as well or better than students in face-to-face programs. One caveat should be recognized with respect to those results. First, the online-only programs are new and we have not had many years to see long-standing trends compared

to the traditional delivery methods and do not have large numbers of students enrolled. The results from data collected on retention, graduation rates and final GPAs in both online and traditional program offerings suggest that the success of students in online and/or hybrid programs is comparable to traditional programs.

Online, hybrid and traditional graduate programs.

Distance education courses were compared to face-to-face or traditional-delivery courses to examine whether there are differences in degree completion rates, time to degree, or graduation rates. In comparing these programs, it is acknowledged that the online-delivery format for these programs is recent and therefore, overall enrollment in those programs is less (up to 10x fewer students) than the corresponding face-to-face programs that have existed for many years. The programs that are compared below include the Online MBA (n= 28 students; OMBA), the Executive MBA (n= 105 students; EMBA), the “traditional” MBA (n= 344 students; MBA), the Hybrid MSW (n=52 students; HMSW) and the “traditional” MSW (n=531 students; MSW). In total, 1,060 students have enrolled in these graduate programs during the time covered in this analysis and presented in figures below.

The online graduate programs are delivered through self-support University Extended Education (UEE) and have a higher cost than the traditional delivery programs. That factor alone may motivate students differently to complete their programs at greater rates than those in state-supported programs. Also considerations are that these programs provide more flexibility for working adults, and the Hybrid MSW program is a cohort program.

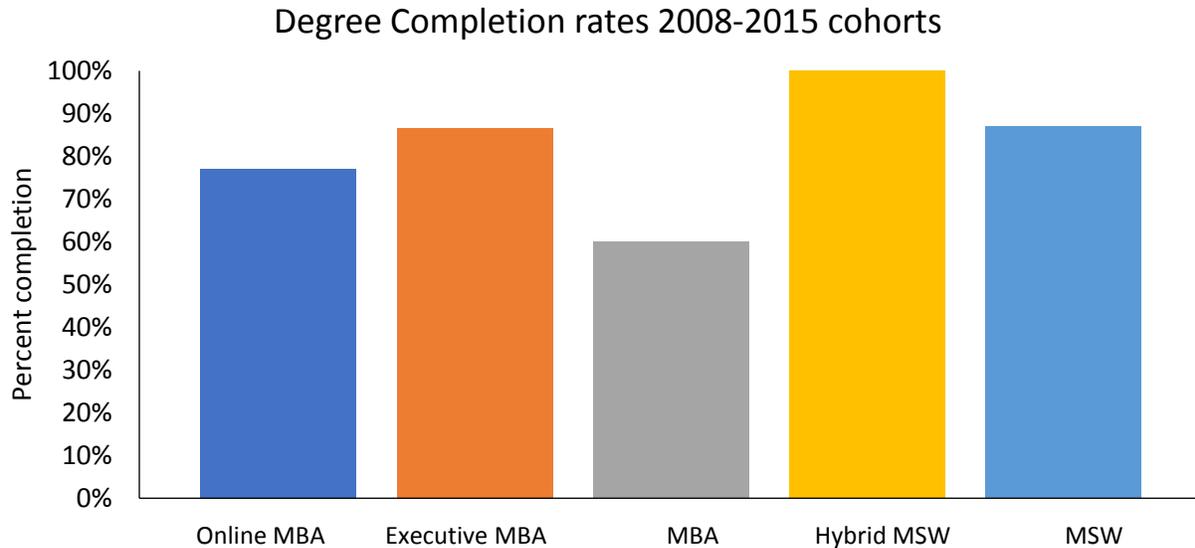


Figure 1. Average completion rates among students from the 2008-2015 admit term cohorts compared among different styles of instructional delivery as a percentage of overall enrollment within the program. This includes students who stopped out and also those who took several years beyond the expected time-to-degree to finish.

From 2008-2015 admit term cohorts, the completion rates are actually highest in the 'alternative' instructional mode type of graduate program. Both the MSW and the MBA are taught on campus in the 'standard' format, while the other programs (OMBA, EMBA, & HMSW) are taught in alternative ways. The results shown in Fig. 1 indicated success is happening in those programs as more than 75% of students complete the online programs. Degree completion rates among both online, hybrid and face-to-face programs indicate that online degree programs are successful at helping students begin and complete a graduate degree online or in a hybrid setting. In reviewing completion dates only, the results from the 2008-2015 admit term cohorts (the 2016 & 2017 cohort graduation data is not yet available) suggest that those who take the online or hybrid programs are more likely to earn a degree than those in the face-to-face programs. This result indicates that, at least for the online graduate programs, online delivery and management of a graduate program can be very successful, contrasting with a possible perception that online programs/courses are lower quality or have low completion rates (see *Quality Assurance Process* above).

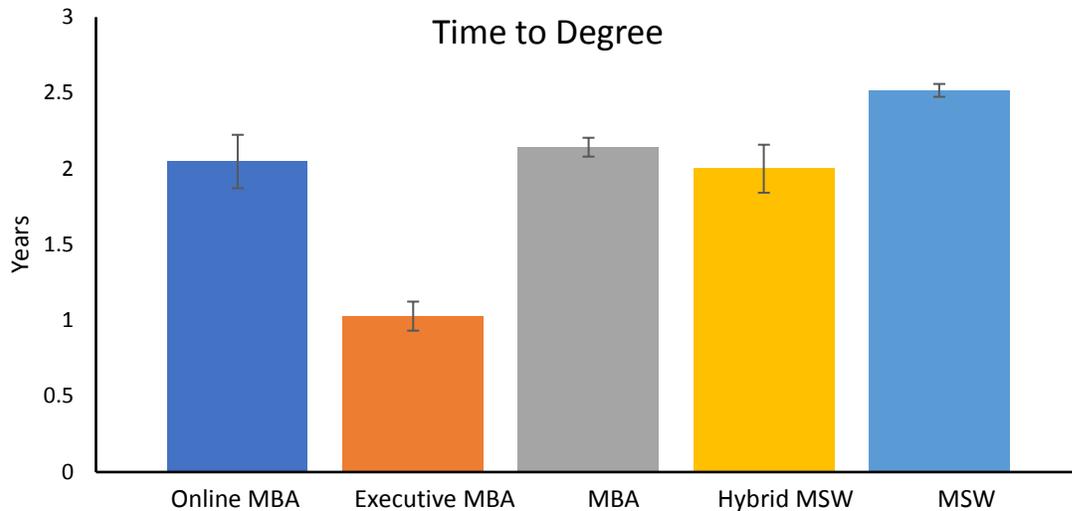


Figure 2. Average completion rates among students from the 2008-2015 cohorts compared among different styles of instructional delivery as a percentage of overall enrollment within the program. This figure does not include students who stopped out, but does include those who took several years beyond expected time-to-degree to finish. Bars indicate ± 1 Standard Error (SE).

Time-to-degree varies among programs, but in terms of master's-level programs, the differences are minimal. The online programs have the most variation in completion dates, with the OMBA having a slightly wider range than the Hybrid MSW. The program with the longest time to completion is the MSW – nearly two full years, which is typical for a graduate program in that field. In addition, very little variation exists in degree completion time among students within programs, indicating that the vast majority of the students are prepared, perform well, and the program is managed carefully by the faculty.

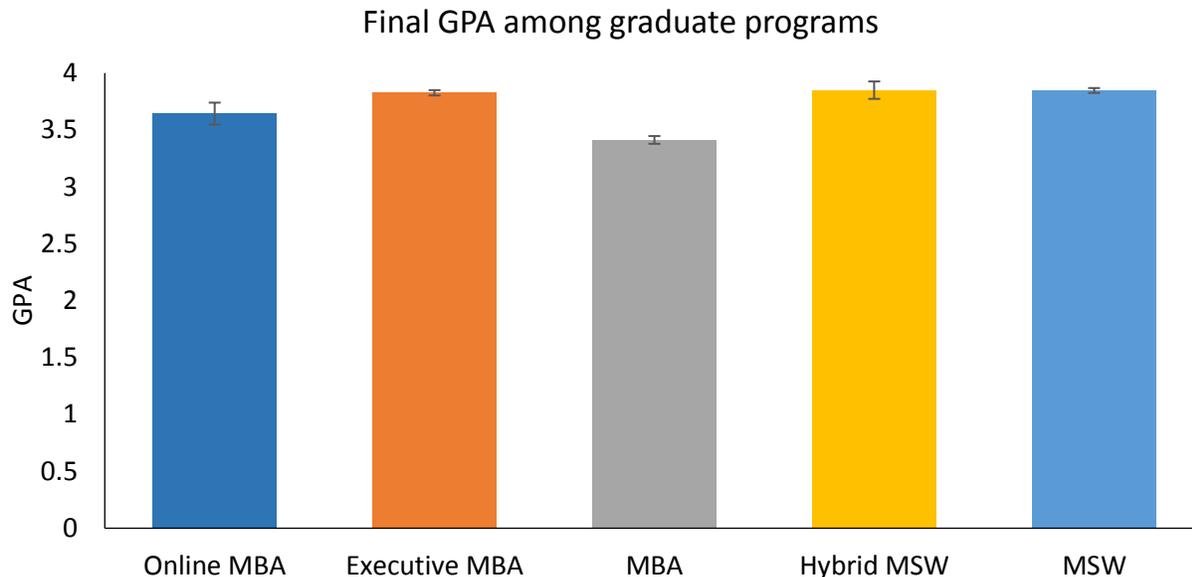


Figure 3. Final GPA (4.0 scale) among graduate programs across different teaching modalities. The GPAs included are from students who completed the programs. Error bars are ± 1 SE.

Students perform at least at the same level (as measured by GPAs) or better in the ‘alternative’ teaching mode programs. OMBA admit term cohort GPAs were higher in 5 of 6 years, with the average difference of .170 GPA points. In the first year of the OMBA, the online cohort was only .02 GPA points lower than the face-to-face MBA GPA. This means EMBA has higher GPA in every ending cohort compared with MBA. For the MSW, the HMSW was lower one year (by 0.2 GPA units) and nearly the same in the other cohort year (difference = .004 GPA points).

Using ANOVA on Box-Cox transformed data, the only significant difference between ending GPAs is that GPAs in the MBA program (3.41) are statistically significantly lower than the EMBA (3.82). Otherwise, there is no significant difference among program ending GPAs.

Of the just-over 1,000 students who have enrolled in these master’s programs since 2008, 411 have not completed their respective programs. That number includes 231 students who started programs in 2016, 2017, or 2018 and completion has not yet been reported for those students. Removing that set of students suggests that about 180 have started programs, but not completed their master’s program thus far (nearly 17% stop out). That finding also suggests that by far (about 83%), more students complete the master’s programs than stop out, and from that perspective can be considered very successful as individual programs, as a set of programs, and especially for online programs, again providing evidence to dispel the notion that students in online programs are less successful because of the nature of the instruction.

Online undergraduate programs.

The online RN-BSN program is very new and has only graduated a single cohort, so data are presented here without figures. The graduation rate of the first RN-BSN online cohort was 91%

and the placement rate was 100% as reported in their Accreditation report. The average GPA so far for the face-to-face program is 3.37, while that of the first online RN-BSN cohort averaged 3.18.