



NCHEMS

Oregon Network for Education
(ONE)

Year Two Evaluation
(October 1998 – March 2001)

Submitted to
Oregon University System
Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education
Grant

March 2001

**National Center for Higher Education Management Systems
P.O. Box 9752 • Boulder, Colorado 80301-9752 • (303) 497-0301**

Oregon Network for Education (ONE)

Year Two Evaluation

Introduction

In fall 1998, the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) awarded the Oregon University System (OUS) a grant to develop the web-based Oregon Network for Education (ONE). Near the end of Year One of the grant, OUS administrators asked NCHEMS to evaluate the FIPSE grant and a 1999 Learning Anytime Anywhere Partnership (LAAP) grant. Due to the late start, this document is the evaluation report for Years One and Two of the three-year Oregon Network for Education FIPSE grant covering the period from October 1998 through March 2001.

The third and final year of the grant began October 1, 2000. Shortly after that and also after the beginning of the fall quarter at all Oregon institutions, NCHEMS staff conducted in-person interviews with Oregon University System faculty, staff, and administrators. She interviewed sixteen people involved in some capacity with the ONE project. The interviews took place in several locations including the Oregon University System offices in Eugene and Corvallis, at Oregon State University in Corvallis, and during the LAAP Showcase daylong conference also held in Corvallis. In addition, she has participated in conference calls of the ONE Steering Committee, regularly reviews documents and the ONE website, and consults with OUS grant administrators. This document briefly discusses overall grant administration, aspects of the ONE website, and the common course marketplace before giving suggestions for the final year of the grant.

Overall Grant Administration

The ONE grant seeks to a) expand access to distance-delivered courses and programs for all citizens of Oregon, and b) increase cooperation among Oregon institutions. The vast majority of this grant is focused on developing and rolling out a new web-based, searchable common catalog that can be found at www.oregonONE.org, "Oregon's one-stop site for college and university distance education." Prior to the initial granting of funds, considerable preliminary work had been done by OUS personnel allowing them to start quickly once FIPSE funding began. Because of the rapid start in 1998, the ONE website was able to "go public" in April 2000, a year and a half after work had started in earnest on it.

Respondents were quite supportive of ONE administrators, had few criticisms, and made constructive suggestions regarding ONE. They noted that as ONE was developed, it was adapted to best meet the needs of learners and instructors in the state. Many positive remarks were offered about the leadership provided for ONE by the Oregon University System.

Development, Rollout, and Maintenance of ONE

The primary outcome of FIPSE funding to the Oregon University System was the development and rollout of the Oregon Network for Education, ONE, website. This section discusses the history, functionality, institutional involvement and technical assistance issues, linkage with the LAAP grant, and finally, what the future of ONE might be.

History and Development of ONE

Early discussions about ONE began about five years ago. One participant described the process “like pulling teeth” to generate interest for ONE statewide at that time. Although many people liked the idea of a centrally located distance education clearinghouse, few were willing to commit to work on such an endeavor. OUS administrators thought that it was important enough to submit a proposal to the U.S. Department of Education for funding. The FIPSE grant validated and provided direction to the earlier statewide discussions. With continuing leadership from OUS, ONE became a functioning reality in April 2000. While work remains to be done to encourage widespread awareness and use of the website, system- and institution-level administrators believe ONE will reduce barriers and expand course and program offerings in the state, eventually allowing economies of scale to be achieved.

ONE Functionality

Tangible outcomes of funding provided for ONE include:

- The new catalog website www.oregonONE.org containing distance education data from
 - 10 Oregon community colleges
 - 8 Oregon universities
 - 4 independent Oregon higher education institutions
 - 76 programs
 - 1,966 courses
- Technical assistance to institutions to streamline and automate institutional procedures used to populate the ONE database.
- Development of a “course edit tool” for institutions to correct information that might need updating without needing to fully repopulate the ONE database.
- Addition (in March 2001) of a “key word search” of the database.
- TV and radio public service announcements, featuring Governor Kitzhaber urging Oregonians to use the new ONE website, distributed to 17 television and 35 radio stations in Oregon.
- ONE posters distributed to 1,230 Oregon K-12 schools, 220 public libraries, 45 county extension service offices, 52 radio and television stations, and 22 higher education institutions.

From the beginning, ONE has been designed for ease of searching. Searching functionality allows for selection from the database using single or multiple options for either courses or programs (see option listings below). “Advanced search tips” describe how to search using multiple choices in each option area. After an initial search to limit offerings, users may additionally sort their course selections by course, institution, and level; the program database allows for additional sorting of selected programs by subject, institution, and degree.

Course Search Functionality

Options

Subject
Institution
Level of Study
Delivery Method
Academic Term

Program Search Functionality

Options

Subject
Granting Institution
Level of Study

Users requested a “key word search” which has been integrated into the ONE database and became functional in March 2001.

Institutional Involvement

The statewide belief that a common site was needed to collect distance education information compelled all types of higher education institutions—four-year, two-year, public, and private—in Oregon to be involved in early planning and approval of the specifications and schematic that would be used as the blueprint for ONE. Now, continuing involvement is based on institutional needs. Some people are surprised that more institutions are not choosing to list their courses and programs through ONE. However, upon closer examination, a majority of public institutions in the state are participating. Fully one hundred percent (8 of 8) of public Oregon universities and nearly sixty percent (10 of 17) of Oregon community colleges list courses and programs at ONE. Community colleges that are not participating in ONE have smaller enrollments and do not offer many distance education offerings that could be shared. Involvement by these institutions in ONE is still encouraged and is possible, should they decide to participate in the future. Only about twenty percent (4 of 18) of private, non-profit four-year institutions in Oregon are taking part in ONE. Those institutions that are not involved tend to be small, specialized institutions, most without distance education offerings. The remaining private institutions are relatively prestigious and may feel that they are already attractive to potential students without participating in ONE. Nevertheless, independent colleges in Oregon are kept informed to facilitate their participation when they do want to get involved and a representative of the Oregon Independent Colleges Association receives mailing and listserv information.

Technical Assistance

Information Technology Services (ITS), a division in the Oregon University System Chancellor’s Office that reports to the Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration, is responsible for the programming and computer maintenance of ONE. The academic and institutional oversight of ONE occurs in the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs division. The development of the Oregon Network for Education has been an occasion for these two divisions of the Chancellor’s Office to work together on a common project. Individuals from ITS and Academic Affairs have collaborated to make ONE optimal for everyone concerned. ITS personnel have tried to build a catalog and site requiring minimal intervention. Some institutions had problems because of the different structures of their institutional databases and the ONE database. Since this problem could be solved with the writing of relatively low-cost computer programs, grant funding was provided this year to institutions to pay for institutional programmers to write code to bridge the databases. Fourteen institutions (7 community colleges and 7 universities) took advantage of this opportunity and received funds. These one-time fixes alleviated problems obviating any need for continuing funding of this type of activity.

ITS has devised three avenues for institutions to add their courses to the ONE database. The first is “database-based submission” that allows for extraction of needed data elements from home institution’s database into the ONE database. This method is used mostly by large institutions with many courses. The second is via a Microsoft Access database. This method was developed for institutions that do not maintain a centralized database of distance education courses. This procedure is complicated and institutions have begun to use the third method—a “course edit tool”—because it is web-based and more straightforward. The new course edit tool allows campuses with limited distance education offerings to hand enter data updating existing courses or creating new course listings.

ITS professionals and ONE staff developed detailed help pages giving definitions, specifications of data fields, and step-by-step instructions to participating campuses (see www.oregonONE.org/contributors). Programmers also annotated code to document decisions and choices that were made during the writing of the computer programs for the ONE website. In addition, a succinct question and answer explanation of the technical specifications, time, money, and decisions that underlie the website is available at www.oregonONE.org/techspecs.htm . This document provides a comprehensive overview of why decisions and choices were made as the website was developed.

Link with LAAP

ONE is an important supplement to LAAP; it provides a centralized information center that includes LAAP-funded redesigned courses and programs among its offerings. It is another avenue for LAAP faculty to disseminate their courses and programs and for academic advisors to help students find appropriate distance education learning opportunities. This synergy is partially aided by the broad definitions used in ONE to encourage more institutions to list their offerings. This choice was originally a bit controversial because some people wanted narrower definitions that would include only online learning opportunities. However, because of Oregon’s history delivering instruction via video, other media, and in blended formats, the decision was made to use broader definitions.

Future of ONE

ONE must remain a priority project with the Chancellor, the Commissioner for Community Colleges, and with the K-12 community. To do this, the two units of the Chancellor’s office required for ONE to remain functional have established a good working rapport that includes formal documentation of time estimated, time spent, and specifics about changes made to the database in the previous year and anticipated in the coming year. For example, next year they are hoping to add a mechanism coined “Goodbye ONE” that would compile exit information from the ONE website. These data would indicate where (which website) someone goes after leaving the ONE website. Of particular interest is information about persons pursuing their interests and choosing Oregon institutional websites. Web usage statistics available now indicate definite rhythms in the use of the ONE website with increasing hits when students are planning their future schedules. But the potential of the ONE database has yet to be fully realized because students do not know how to use the website to its best advantage. By increasing student traffic at the ONE website, campuses can be satisfied that the energy they put into the ONE database is being translated into increased marketing of their offerings. “Goodbye ONE” will allow for better measurement of this traffic.

Activities planned in the final year of the grant include installation of a “key word search” in response to requests from students and faculty (accomplished in March 2001). And, a distance education conference is being held in May 2001 to which provosts and other high level administrators, faculty, and staff from all of Oregon’s educational sectors will be invited to discuss ONE, the distance education policy framework developed by the LAAP grant, and how Oregon can best use its distance education resources.

Common Course Marketplace

The original vision of a common course marketplace (CCM) was that: “A CCM course will be able to [be] taken for credit at participating Oregon institutions for residency credit.” In theory, once a course is accepted into the common course marketplace there would be no further questions regarding its appropriateness for transfer because all institutions would have agreed to the marketplace guidelines. These guidelines would presumably include that participating institutions will be accredited and will subscribe to the same learning standards. However, while the discipline-specific groups had valuable conversations, little or no common ground was found. Several problems arose including definition of a minimum objective level or the “lowest common denominator” for learning. In addition, faculty recognized that there were several different conceptualizations of “common.” One concerns the “common” student experience many people feel is a result of residency that is itself a complex response to accreditation and institutional requirements. One possible policy change would require students to take a mandated percentage of their courses from a single institution, whether delivered at a distance or face-to-face; the difference is that students would not necessarily have to be *physically* present on campus. Another conceptualization of “common” refers to the acceptability of courses to faculty within a given department. Finally, a third form is the contrast of “common” with “transferable,” that is, whether instruction is accepted for transfer by all institutions and departments. Oregon has made substantial progress, agreeing on a common course numbering system at the lower division to facilitate the transfer of courses, especially in terms of the Associate of Arts, Oregon Transfer (AAOT) degree. The other issues remain to be worked out.

Some participants expressed frustration that the CCM work was unable to move beyond the discussion stage. The provosts continue to think CCM is a worthwhile idea. However, a new budget model was recently implemented for universities, and they are working to understand the impact of the new model; one outcome could be an increased competition among institutions, which would render a common course marketplace too complicated and politically charged to pursue at this time. In order to build on the work that had been done, grant administrators decided to reframe the CCM portion of the grant in terms of limited-scope course sharing examples and projects that would be preliminary to course sharing. “Demonstration projects” resulted. During the final grant year, these projects will determine clear steps regarding aspects of course sharing that might fit within the common course marketplace framework. The outcomes of these projects should move beyond merely talking about what might be done and why it is impossible to do it, to understanding what particular steps might be taken in order to achieve a working solution in terms of course sharing agreements.

Suggestions

The following suggestions are made in the light of data and information gathered.

- As the end of the funding draws near, grant administrators are doing a good job of formalizing relationships that are required for the continuing presence and maintenance of ONE with ITS and with participating institutions. They are encouraged to continue this work.
- It is imperative to increase learners' awareness of ONE and demonstrate its utility to them. The ONE database has enormous potential, but students do not understand how they can utilize it to best advantage. One method for increasing awareness and use is to conduct formal ONE training with academic advisors—both faculty and professional—from higher education institutions and high schools. Such a training event could demonstrate how academic advisors can incorporate ONE into their advising sessions and encourage them to regularly utilize the site as well as gather input from them on how to improve. The desired consequence of academic advisor training would be the transfer of that training to their advisees, the students.
- Although the common course marketplace has been abandoned for the moment, discussions would benefit from developing clear, shared working definitions, particularly for “common,” “residency,” “acceptability,” and “transferability.” As mentioned previously, respondents indicated that there are at least three interpretations of “common” being used by faculty and administrators at the various campuses. Clarifying these three interpretations, and perhaps using different phrases, might facilitate wider agreement.

Final Year (Year Three) Evaluation Focus

In the final grant year the evaluation will focus on how campuses determine whether and to what extent they utilize ONE. The installation of “Goodbye ONE” will be monitored and any data available will be used to determine flow through the website. The demonstration projects on course sharing will be investigated as will faculty and student responses to ONE after a full year of functioning.

Conclusion

Funding to the Oregon University System for the creation of ONE, the Oregon Network for Education, has been successfully utilized. The ONE website has been functional since April 2000 to all Oregon citizens; indeed it is available to anyone with access to the Internet. The website's value is being enhanced with feedback from students, faculty, and administrators from across Oregon. While work on the common course marketplace has been suspended, the foundation laid by early discussion groups will be used in this year's demonstration projects and in crafting course-sharing agreements among institutions.

Artifacts Collected or Accessed

Oregon Network for Education website, www.OregonONE.org

Memoranda of understanding between Oregon University System Academic Affairs and Information Technical Services re: ONE. Dated: October 30, 1998, January 26, 2000, and January 30, 2001.

The feasibility and processes for implementing a common course marketplace component at the Oregon Network for Education, Discussion Report, Working Draft, October 24, 2000, Oregon University System.

Internal memorandum re: Status Report on the Oregon Network for Education (ONE) dated November 13, 2000.

APPENDIX A

Oregon University System ONE FIPSE Grant

Interview Protocol October 2000

Introductory Remarks

1. What are your impressions and responses to ONE?
2. What issues are arising for degree articulation pathways being developed for ONE?
3. What is happening with the Common Course Marketplace?
4. What do you think will be accomplished by the ONE demonstration projects?

Thank you for taking time and giving your consideration to answering these questions.