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Annual Report on Distance Education

Action Requested:

Receive the report.

Executive Summary:

Regent enterprise distance education programming makes learning available to many people for whom attending classes on campus would be unfeasible. Distance education is provided via the following formats: off-campus classes, guided independent study, the Iowa Communications Network (ICN), the worldwide web, and other digital and electronic media.

Over the last three years, the number of Regent university courses and programs offered through distance education has remained steady. Enrollment in both credit and non-credit distance courses has also been stable. Regent universities' distance education programs continue to reach students who live and work in communities throughout Iowa: in 2004-2005 there were 25,343 student enrollments representing 453 Iowa communities in all 99 Iowa counties.

Current Trends:

1. **Aggressive Competition for Distance Learners**

Part of this general trend, largely sustained by web-based instructional programming, is the competition for students by institutions located throughout the country as well as in Iowa and neighboring states.

2. **Positive Shift on Campuses to Provide More Distance Education Opportunities**

Such factors as ongoing improvements in educational technology and greater sophistication of students as consumers of higher education have contributed to a greater interest among faculty and administration in offering distance education options where possible.

3. **Flat State Financial Support Affects Distance Education**

Even though distance education units are self-supporting, the quality and availability of distance education offerings reflect the fiscal realities confronting the entire university; e.g., with respect to faculty compensation and universities' ability to offer courses.

4. **ICN Enrollments Continue to Decline for SUI and ISU**

As a result of an ongoing and deliberate shift from the use of the ICN, enrollments in courses delivered via the ICN by SUI and ISU have declined every year of the last five years. In contrast, UNI continues to make considerable use of the ICN. Factors contributing to the continued decline in use of the ICN are the relative expense of the ICN, and the widespread availability and relative affordability of web-based instructional delivery as an alternative.

5. **Technology Presents Benefits and Challenges**

The universities report that Iowa students generally have better connectivity than ever before, even in the most rural areas. Nevertheless, application of digital educational technology presents unique challenges; e.g., costs for updating and supporting hardware and software.

6. **Regent Universities Continue to Provide and Expand Program Completion Opportunities in Distance Education Formats**

These include the following:

- The Bachelor of Liberal Studies (BLS) – degree completion program for associate of arts and associate of science community college graduates.
- The Bachelor of Applied Studies (BAS) – (approved by the Board of Regents in June, 2005) degree completion program for associate of applied science community college graduates.

- The Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) - offered by the SUI College of Nursing, for associate of applied science nursing graduates of community colleges.
- Articulation agreements between UNI and each Iowa community college allows students to obtain bachelor's degrees in industrial technology.

Report on Strategic Plan Indicators

The Board of Regents' 2004-2009 strategic plan identifies distance education as a key means of facilitating student access and transitions to higher education (Objectives 1.1 and 1.3). Table 1, below, reports on strategic plan indicators related to distance education.

Report on Board of Regents' Strategic Plan Indicators related to Distance Education			
	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05
Credit courses and programs¹			
number of programs (degree, certificate, endorsement)	59	61	67
number of course sections	1,650	1,748	1,753
student enrollments (duplicated headcount)	26,228	25,210	25,343
Non-credit courses			
student enrollments (duplicated headcount)	474,957	479,676	478,230

Planned Collaborative Activities related to Distance Education

In June 2005, the Board of Regents approved the universities' strategic plan for distance education. The plan provides a framework for the ongoing development, administration, and delivery of distance education. The universities will report on progress on and updates to the plan to the Council of Provosts.

The mission of the State Extension, Continuing, and Distance Education Committee (SECDEC) includes supporting collaboration among the Regents universities distance education. Pending collaborative activities include:

- a research project to evaluate the Bachelor in Liberal Studies (BLS) degree programs and the University of Iowa's BSN program.
- a joint promotional campaign among the Regents universities targeting Western Iowa to feature the Bachelor of Liberal Studies degree program

Regional Study Centers

The Regent universities provide services and programming through the three regional study centers (located in Rock Island, IL; Sioux City; and Council Bluffs). These include: regional promotion of Regent programs; distribution of registration, scheduling, and program information to area students; offering some on-site services such as proctoring tests; and networking with area employers and others to identify distance programming needs. The universities also deliver courses through the Des Moines Higher Education Collaborative located in Des Moines.

Detailed Statistics on File at the Board Office

Data tables on file at the Board Office provide details about the Regents universities' distance education enrollment and programming.

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¹ Figures concern only off-campus courses and programs. These are delivered in such formats as the following: off-campus classes, guided independent study, ICN, WWW, and other digital, electronic, and print media.