

**MEMORANDUM**

**To:** Board of Regents  
**From:** Board Office  
**Subject:** Report of the Priority Issue Study Group on Distributed Learning  
**Date:** April 9, 2001

**Recommended Actions:**

1. Receive the final report of the Priority Issue Study Group (PSG) on Distributed Learning.
2. Establish a "2+2 Committee" that includes representatives of community colleges and Regent presidents, provosts, chief academic officers, and the Board Office.
3. Establish a "Coordinating Committee" to coordinate and facilitate a virtual presence among the Regent universities.

**Executive Summary:**

In July 1999, the Board appointed a Priority Issue Study Group on Distance Education. Its purpose was to review policies, issues, and plans related to distance education. A number of specific charges, described below, were assigned the Committee -- Regents Ellengray Kennedy (convenor), David Fisher, and David Neil.

Based on input from institutional representatives and Board Office staff, the PSG has assisted in the revision of a new distance education policy (adopted by the Board in February 2000), investigated the costs of distance learning, encouraged Regent university participation in the Des Moines Higher Education Center, and received a report on the feasibility of establishing a "virtual" entity. Based on its work, the PSG is now recommending to the Board two action plans. The first is to establish a "2+2 Committee" whose overall purpose would be the promotion of efforts between community colleges and the universities to improve the transition of students, i.e., to develop a seamless system. The second is to establish a "Coordinating Committee" whose purpose would be continued exploration of a feasible electronic system of Regent courses and programs.

**Background:**

Access is one of the Key Result Areas (KRAs) of the Board of Regents' Strategic Plan. This KRA reflects a long-standing Board policy that encourages the three Regent universities to make programs available around the state, especially to place-bound adults. Accountability is another KRA in the Board's Strategic Plan. Knowing that fiscal as well as technical issues were involved in developing distance education programs, the Board established a Priority Issue Study Group on Distance Education in July 1999.

The charge for the PSG was as follows:

- Review several specific distance education matters and develop recommendations to the Board as necessary;
- Consider possible refinements or clarifications to the Board's distance education policy necessary to ensure that the policy is effective and serving the purpose that it was intended to serve, including the interests and needs of all regions of the state;
- Oversee development of response(s) to legislative study on existing distance education offerings in Iowa;
- Review the role of the Iowa Coordinating Council for Post High School Education regarding the Regent universities' distance education offerings and collaborative efforts;
- Review relationships with community colleges involving distance education offerings;
- Other issues related to distance learning, including cost and quality assurance measures.

To address the tasks of the charge, the PSG worked with institutional representatives and Board Office staff. One work group reviewed institutional strategic plans and performance indicators regarding distance education and revised components of the Annual Distance Education Report, including how incremental costs of distance education are computed. A second work group investigated the feasibility of establishing a "virtual university." These efforts extended the deadline for reporting recommendations to the Board.

**Analysis:**

Members of the PSG determined that the term "distributed education" better described Board and institutional interests regarding distance education. The Board approved the name change in October 2000. Since then, the PSG has also used the term "distributed learning," which is meant to place an emphasis upon the adult student as primary participant in the educational process.

One of the changes that has occurred as part of the revision of Distance Education policy is the review process for new programs. The voluntary association of public and private higher education institutions, the Iowa Coordinating Council for Post High School Education (ICCPHSE), no longer approves offerings; rather, its members review and provide comments on proposed new courses and programs.

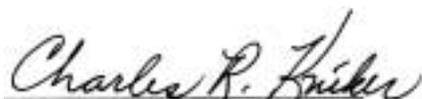
A national education trend promoted in many states is the development of a "seamless" process for students moving through the K-16 system. Currently, Regent universities and the community colleges have a general articulation agreement to aid the transition of students moving from Associate of Arts degrees to university degree programs. In addition, individual community colleges and a Regent university have established "2+2" agreements for specific technical and professional programs. In such collaborative programs, students take the first two years at the community college and their remaining two years are provided by the university, either in their community or on campus.

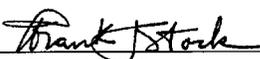
The PSG recommends that the mission of Regent universities to provide access to all qualified Iowans is likely to be enhanced through the establishment of a "2+2 Committee." Comprised of representatives of community colleges and Regent institutional presidents, provosts, and Board Office staff, the Committee would:

- Collaborate to market and deliver programs and degrees (using appropriate technology and structures).
- Develop a common website, using Web CT and/or e-College courses, as appropriate. Develop partnerships with all community colleges desiring to participate.
- Ensure a seamless system for students in areas of support services and enrollment management.
- Investigate and establish joint admissions for on-line and transfer students.
- Develop the process for accountability, including periodic reports to the Board of Regents.

The PSG recommends that the Board also establish a "Coordinating Committee" to coordinate and facilitate a virtual presence among the Regent universities. The "Virtual University" Committee presented a detailed action plan to the PSG on February 21, 2001. It is attached (pages 5-7). The recommendations of this memorandum reflect the plan and ensuing discussion. The PSG believes implementation would best be done through a committee comprised of representatives of the Regent universities and the Board Office.

The complex issues of distributed learning require that the work of the PSG be extended. Since its inception, the PSG has been involved with the development of a new distance education policy of the Board, witnessed a change in the ICCPHSE review process, encouraged the Regent institutions as they became partners in the Des Moines Higher Education Center, and overseen the development of changes in Board governance reports on distance education data and incremental costs. The PSG offers this final report, and makes its recommendations for an action plan as indicated above.

  
Charles R. Kniker

Approved:   
Frank J. Stork

## VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Virtual University Committee Report<sup>1</sup> was discussed with the Distance Education Priority Study Group at its September meeting. Subsequently, during the Board of Regents meeting in October, 2000, the Report was reviewed by the ICEC. The ICEC suggested that recommendations should be developed regarding action steps that might be take by the Board of Regents and the Regent Institutions to implement virtual entity. The following possible action steps are recommended:

### 1. Appoint a Virtual University Coordinating Council

The Board of Regents should appoint a Virtual University Coordinating Council. The Council will define and “name” the virtual entity and develop a process to assure its funding and implementation. During and after implementation, the Council will oversee the operation of the virtual entity and provide for its funding. The VU Coordinating Council membership will include the following:

- ◆ Regent institutional members who have the authority and responsibility to make commitments on behalf of their institutions. Each president should appoint two members from his or her institution to a 2-year term. The terms should be staggered to preserve continuity.
- ◆ Over half of the remaining council members should be from business and industry (outside of academia), so that representation on the council from academia represents less than 50% of the membership.
- ◆ One Regent as liaison member.

The Council should be appointed no later than May 2001 and should have appropriate staffing (at least 2 FTE). The BOR should allocate a budget for the Council consistent with the Board’s annual work plan. The Council should meet monthly at the location and time of the BOR meetings.

### 2. Conduct Assessment(s)

The Council should develop a plan for preparing the terms of reference to conduct a needs assessment (of clients’ educational needs) and an assessment of the infrastructure investments (by the institutions) necessary to meet the expectations of the clients.

- ◆ Within three months of being constituted, the Council will present a plan for the needs and infrastructure assessments and accompanying budget to the Board of Regents. The plan will include input from the Iowa Department of Economic Development and other agencies appropriate to such an assessment.

---

<sup>1</sup> Appendix A.

## VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◆ The likely cost of the needs assessment will be \$200,000-\$400,000; funding will be negotiated between the Board of Regents and the participating institutions. The needs assessment should be completed within six months after it is approved by the Board. The related infrastructure assessment should be completed within five months.

### 3. Begin Infrastructure Development

The Council will oversee common infrastructure development needed (consistent with the infrastructure assessment and the needs assessment) for the virtual entity. The infrastructure development must be coordinated among the Regent institutions and will include the following “common” components which must be in place within two years after the Council is constituted. Significant budgetary resources will likely be required to design, test, and implement the components of the “necessary” infrastructure.

- ◆ On-line, joint registration system. This system should also allow for joint registration with community colleges.
- ◆ An automated degree audit system;
- ◆ Online (web accessible) student financial services;
- ◆ Distributed library and other student support services;
- ◆ Common catalog and course numbering system;
- ◆ Accreditation requirements.

### 4. Foster Policy and Procedure Development

The Council will oversee the development of common policies across the Regent institutions that encourage units, faculty, and staff to engage with the virtual entity initiative. These include policies and procedures related to the following:

- ◆ Faculty incentives;
- ◆ Intellectual property rights;
- ◆ Public-private partnership development;
- ◆ Positioning the Regent institutions to serve Iowa in a more comprehensive manner;
  - Developing national and international access to the competitive core competencies of the Regent universities;
  - Fostering a culture that will make the Regent universities competitive in the new education environment.