

Executive Summary (to be included at the beginning of the document following the TOC)

“Effective Workload Management Strategies for the Online Environment” is a report outlining research conducted by The Pennsylvania State University’s World Campus, funded by the Alfred P. Sloan foundation. A selection of the most effective workload management strategies, chosen by experienced online educators from national and international institutes of learning, are divided into the following four categories: (1) Authoring Strategies, (2) Teaching Strategies, (3) Course Improvement and Revision Strategies, and (4) Institutional Strategies. All four of these areas are important to the success of an online teaching program, and institutions interested in using the strategies are encouraged to customize them to their own needs, and cultivate flexibility, creativity, and teamwork in this effort.

These strategies serve as the basis of an evolving process to collect and catalog a variety of feedback from experienced online educators in how they reduce the amount of time and energy in the online environment. It is expected that the original four categories identified through this project will expand as will the number of strategies identified in each category. As new information becomes available, workshops are conducted, and experienced is gained, the subsequent editions will reflect growing knowledge about how to manage the online workload. The desire is that new practitioners of online education can benefit from this recorded expertise.

The most effective authoring strategies collected from faculty experienced in online teaching include adopting a course development model, identifying and acquiring existing learning resources, establishing and distributing reusable templates, providing the course author with a sample online course, providing students with specific instruction for assignments, applying project planning and management methods to the course development process, establishing a course development team, designing balanced instructional activities, finalizing one module or unit before developing the remainder of the course, developing rubrics for each graded student assignment, and creating a learning object database. Depending on the type of institution and the resources available, some of the recommended strategies for reducing faculty workload during the course development period may be preferred over others. The institution, by no means, has to use all of the strategies. In general, a combination of strategies customized for the particular institution will work best, and with each new course under development further customization and flexibility will help to streamline the process.

The most effective strategies for reducing faculty workload during the teaching phase of online instruction include clarifying and enhancing students’ technical skills before registration, providing a detailed syllabus, defining the operating parameters of the course, creating feedback rubrics, establishing a routine, incorporating a learning management system for recording course transactions, fostering group dynamics within the course, beginning the course with an activity that encourages interaction, and establishing consistent, effective methods of electronic communication. Teaching strategies focus on making sure the audience is ready for the material (and helping them

to hone their technological skills if not), providing high quality communication in both the instructional and the interactive aspects of the course, and developing streamlined methods for managing course events and transactions. Here again, depending on the type of institution and the course material itself, some teaching strategies may prove more useful than others, and flexibility and customization are recommended to create optimum workload efficiency.

It is easy to overlook course revision and improvement strategies while in the throes of new development, but as the institution progresses through development of a selection of courses and programs the inevitability of course revision becomes apparent. Proper management of resources includes projecting the volume and frequency of revision necessary and budgeting accordingly. Recommended strategies to reduce faculty workload and avoid the pressure of overcommitment include conducting multiple evaluations of the courses, conducting a pilot run or initiating an expert internal review before release of the course, managing the revision cycle as an integral part of the course, developing methods for managing dynamic course elements (updates), inviting student feedback at the close of the course, developing and maintaining a course history, involving the original course author in the revision process, and rewarding students for reporting errors in the course material.

Institutional strategies form the foundation of successful development of online instruction. Without the support of the institution, faculty struggle under unmanageable workloads, prohibitive costs, isolation, and time-consuming learning curves involving new technologies. Successful strategies for institutional support of faculty include ensuring faculty access to instructional design and systems support, providing adequate faculty development opportunities, providing technical support for faculty and students, providing an adequate learning management system, establishing institutional parameters for online operation, integrating institutional administrative systems and tools, providing clear institutional policies on intellectual property rights, defining the role of online education in the mission of the institution, developing institutional policy for compensating and rewarding faculty and academic units, and providing copyright and permissions support and policies.

Careful application of these strategies to the needs of online educators can significantly enhance the success of the online education program. “Effective Workload Management Strategies for the Online Environment” is an evolving set of such strategies, a work in progress, and new strategies will be added as the history of online education progresses.