



# INDIANA UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT  
FOR UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

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## **IU ONLINE: A COLLABORATIVE MODEL FOR ONLINE EDUCATION AT INDIANA UNIVERSITY**

Fully online, asynchronous delivery of education, as part of a course of study directed toward a degree or career-enhancing certificate, has become an important component of the offerings of comprehensive institutions of higher education. Online course work offers students flexibility in scheduling and access to more courses; it offers faculty opportunities for innovation, enrichment, and collaboration in their teaching; and it allows institutions to reach a wider and more diverse population of students. The appeal of online instruction to students has created significant risks and significant opportunities from competition from online-oriented institutions and traditional institutions that offer online options, and these risks and opportunities cannot be ignored even by well established, traditional institutions of higher education.

Online education creates the potential for separating instruction from geography to an unprecedented degree. While the extent of the separation can be overstated (for example, more students take *some* online courses than take *all* of their courses online; students often prefer online courses from their in-person campuses), the number of students who participate in online instruction – even at primarily in-person institutions – is very large and growing. Online education also largely erases the unique physical attributes (location, access to particular programs, campus amenities, etc.) that differentiate in-person institutions. As a result, online education greatly intensifies the potential for competition among institutions and within multi-campus institutions, and thus it also challenges the traditional, place-based organization of academic programs and of university fiscal and governance structures. It is no longer possible, as it once was, for an individual university or campus to be both entirely free to pursue its own educational programming, and to be protected (in practice, if not in principle) from competition from others' programs.

Internal competition is an issue for all multi-campus institutions, and especially for an institution like IU which is a single university offering a single IU degree. Some institutions have solved the problem of internal competition by ignoring (and thus permitting) competition among their constituent parts; others by centralizing online delivery in a separate online "campus"; others by centrally designating a single online provider within the system; and still others by outsourcing delivery to educational publishers in exchange for a large percentage of tuition revenue. But internal competition satisfies no one, and it squanders the substantial benefits of scale, sharing resources, name recognition, and diversity of offerings – all of which a large and highly regarded

institution ought to be able to bring to online education. And the centralized options – to say nothing of outsourcing – exclude most campuses from participation in this important mode of delivering education and attracting students, and attenuate faculty control of curriculum.

The IU Online approach described below seeks to protect and advance the all-important academic integrity of an IU degree, permit broad sharing in the opportunities presented by online education, and take advantage of IU's scale, resources, reputation, and diversity of offerings. In this sense, it takes lessons from approaches that have not worked, and instead develops a new one that is based on extensive coordination and collaboration in academic programs and finance in fully online educational programs. This approach has developed over time and will undoubtedly continue to do so. The following describes the collaborative approach as concisely as possible – outlining IU's objectives and operating principles regarding online education (IU Online), and the roles of the Office of Online Education (OOE) and Online Class Connect (OCC). It is based, with some updating, on the detailed report, *Moving Forward 2.0: IU Online Implementation Plan* (<https://uaa.iu.edu/academic/ooe/documents.shtml>), which was presented to IU's President and Board of Trustees in July 2015.

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## **A. Strategic Objectives**

1. Growth of total (net) enrollment through –
  - a. Online degrees in popular disciplines with strong student demand, with the objective of being the leading major-university provider of high-quality online degrees, especially in the upper Midwest. These will be the primary focus of the OOE pipeline and resources.
  - b. Online programs leveraging IU's special strengths, with the objective of being a unique, selective provider nationally and globally. These primarily originate with individual units, though OOE may make recommendations; OOE will facilitate and support as needed.
  - c. Access degrees (*e.g.*, BAS, BGS, other flexible interdisciplinary degrees), with the objective of supporting IU's access mission. OOE will organize these in consultation with campuses.
  - d. "Stackable" credentials (*e.g.*, certificates and integrated or accelerated masters programs) with evidence of student demand, with the objective of being a leading provider of such opportunities. These primarily originate with individual units and are supported by OOE.
2. Increasing retention and degree completion and reducing time to degree (through expanded offerings, convenience) for existing IU students.
3. Platform for innovation in education.

## **B. Operating Principles for IU Online**

1. Collaboration is the standard
  - a. There will be no internal competition between, or duplication of, fully online degrees unless they are readily distinguishable by potential students on terms such as price, subject matter, admission requirements; most fully online degrees will be collaborative among campuses that choose to participate.

- b. The collaboration requirement applies to fully (i.e., 80% or more<sup>1</sup>) online degrees only; campuses may offer independent hybrid degrees (21% or more in-person) and individual online courses. Campuses are encouraged to consider a portfolio of delivery formats.
  - c. Participation in fully online degrees is open to all campuses with capacity to offer relevant courses; participation is required for none.
  - d. No campus shall prevent another campus with capacity from offering or participating in a fully online degree.
2. Use normal university processes
- a. Students are assigned a home campus of enrollment for the purposes of registration, enrollment data, general education requirements, tuition and fees, and the granting of the degree. Online students may transfer among campuses on the same terms as other students.
  - b. OOE works with the campus academic officers to develop the administrative elements of collaborative programs.
  - c. OOE works with the academic officers to convene the faculty of participating campuses to develop the shared curriculum. The disciplinary curriculum for fully online degrees is developed by the disciplinary faculty of the participating campuses; students meet the general education requirements of their home campuses.
  - d. Collaborative online programs go through the normal curriculum approval processes in place at each participating campus. The Academic Leadership Council will grant final approval of online curricula, subject to further approvals by the Board of Trustees, Commission for Higher Education, and Higher Learning Commission, as needed.
3. Commitment to quality
- a. Online students will receive a seamless, user-friendly experience in a shared services environment supervised by the Office of Online Education; OOE will use existing campus administrative and support capacity whenever feasible.
  - b. OOE has established and will maintain a system (Quality Matters) of assuring a quality, highly engaging educational experience and transferability among campuses; online courses with the same course name and number are equivalent to in-person courses for the purposes of academic credit and inter-campus transfer.

### **C. Office of Online Education**

- 1. Clearinghouse
  - a. Establish, in consultation with campus academic leadership and University Academic Affairs, a priority list (“pipeline”) of programs to pursue as fully online degrees and certificates. Priority programs will receive time and resources to support more intensive campus participation and faster development; other proposed programs receive basic levels of support, and campuses are expected to take the lead in organizing them according to the IU Online operating principles.
  - b. With University Academic Affairs, develop and maintain collaborative online programs.
  - c. Maintain a public table of all proposed degrees and the status of each.
  - d. Establish procedures and default terms for agreements on curriculum, revenue, and management of fully online degrees and certificates.
  - e. Facilitate faculty development of the shared online curricula.
  - f. Maintain quality assurance systems.
  - g. Manage interactions with other academic policies, e.g., transfer, general education.

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<sup>1</sup> The HLC definition of online degree is much broader, and so hybrid degrees require HLC approval as online degrees. The narrower internal definition is intended to give campuses greater flexibility.

2. Compliance
  - a. Ensure that IU Online courses, programs, and practices comply with standards and regulations imposed by accreditors and with federal and state law.
  - b. Identify and implement best practices in online education established by academic and other organizations, as well as best practices demonstrated by other institutions.
3. Seamless student services
  - a. Provide “wrap-around” student services, including orientation (“onboarding”), coaching and mentoring, online tutoring, student conduct and grievance issues, and career services, to complement and enhance services already provided by the campuses.
  - b. Ensure that the quality of services for online students meet university and student expectations.
4. Marketing and recruitment
  - a. Promote the IU Online brand to accomplish the enrollment goals of the university.
  - b. Conduct market analysis in support of the prioritization of online academic program development.

#### **D. Online Class Connect**

1. OCC is the backbone of collaborative degrees; it is central to the IU approach.
2. Campuses must give “full faith and credit” (*i.e.*, equivalence for all purposes) to online courses from other campuses. Any concerns about course equivalence are addressed through IU’s course discrepancy policy (coordinated by the University Transfer Office).
3. Available online options will be fully transparent to students.
4. Transfer, prerequisite, sequence, and residency rules must be applied to online courses and students on the same terms (formally and in practice) as to home-campus students. Online students are entitled to the most favorable treatment available to other students. As a corollary, a campus’s encouragement (through advising, presentation of offerings, etc.) for students to take home campus courses is permissible and often desirable.
5. Recognizing the need for predictability in enrollments and course offerings, course planning, availability, conflicts, etc. are to be handled by regular communication among campus academic officers, and not through the creation of barriers to the replication of classes or to students’ registration or progress.