

**Report on Online Learning Models (OLM) for the Advising & Mentoring, Blue Sky,  
Competition, Curriculum Strategic Planning Groups  
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**Purpose:**

The purpose of this report is to give the strategic planning groups considering Online Learning Models (OLM) a way of framing these technologies and techniques in a residential, liberal arts context. A companion document, OLM - Specific Recommendations provides our committee's thoughts on technologies and opportunities the College should pursue.

**Working Definition:**

Given that online learning makes use of a variety of pedagogical techniques, technologies, and contexts; it is perhaps not surprising that there is no accepted definition of the phrase "online learning." For the purposes of this exercise we have adopted the working definition used by [The Sloan Consortium](#): "Online courses are those in which at least 80 percent of the course content is delivered online. Face-to-face instruction includes courses in which zero to 29 percent of the content is delivered online; this category includes both traditional and web facilitated courses. The remaining alternative, blended (sometimes called hybrid) instruction has between 30 and 80 percent of the course content delivered online (Allen and Seaman, p. 7, 2011)." This definition is centered on learning activities within the context of a course. In light of the fact that our group has reviewed projects and initiatives that address online learning through multiple approaches, we use the phrase Online Learning Models (OLM).

**Online Learning Models as They Relate to Carleton's Mission:**

Carleton's mission statement is a concise and sequential statement of our mission, vision, values and goals. We see no inherent conflict between the college's mission as currently articulated and an increased engagement with Online Learning Models (OLM). At the level of our institutional *vision*, that document stresses Carleton's aspiration for "discovering and sharing exemplary models of undergraduate education" and that Carleton "seeks to be a leader among colleges..." As is detailed below, done well, OLM can be an effective tool in furthering this vision. Carleton's *valued* connection to the larger community articulated in our aim "to be welcoming and hospitable to its neighbors, guests and the public," as noted below could be supported through locally developed materials potentially developed out of existing initiatives such as academic civic engagement or public scholarship.

At the level of institutional *goals*, OLM has the potential of helping individuals in our community strive to be "active members of a learning and living community that promotes exploration" or develop specific thinking skills such as "disciplinary inquiry, analysis of evidence, arts of communication and argumentation, and problem-solving strategies." In our estimation, Carleton's amplification of our existing use of OLM has further potential as an effective mode of delivery of materials or exercises that support and extend a residential, liberal arts experience.

## **Relevant Assumptions in the Strategic Planning Process:**

As members of the Carleton community examine OLM opportunities, it is critical to stay focused on our core mission and strengths throughout this process. While OLM has the potential to support our work, it also carries temptations to squander resources in a field replete with expensive fads. We must maintain our commitment to:

- Being principally residential college, serving traditionally aged students, and that personal interactions/connections between students and faculty/staff are hallmarks
- Developing and using pedagogical practices suited to a residential liberal arts college

This framing of the larger strategic planning process, was similarly useful in framing our examination of online learning models.

## **Productive and Promising Uses of OLM in a Residential, Liberal Arts Environment:**

The following represents a range of uses of OLM suited to Carleton's scope and mission. Many point to areas in which faculty/staff are already actively engaged and we should continue our efforts while others represent gaps the College should consider addressing.

Online Learning Models (OLM) have the potential to allow us to:

1. Do What We Do Better: In the Classroom
  - a. Help maximize the quality of student/faculty interactions
  - b. Prepare students so that in-class time is devoted to higher level thinking and learning that truly requires a skilled instructor and group-learning environment
  - c. Ease the assessment burden, particularly in the case of formative assessment, on faculty through assessment or quizzing tools that can inform the instructor where students are in their understanding of course materials and drive educational choices faculty make with their students
2. Do What We Do Better: As An Institution
  - a. Gather materials used for institutional-level, summative assessment activities
  - b. Provide a rich academic toolset to support students and faculty members in both general and specialized areas of study
  - c. Increase the coherency of a student's college career by providing tools that enhance a student's ability to plan and engage in advising discussions with faculty/staff
3. Learners: Help "level the playing field" and foster "proactive learners" in cases such as:
  - a. Early in a Carleton student's career students who test into courses (e.g with AP credits) and/or students from under-resourced high schools may need further help in understanding concepts or acquiring skills
  - b. Throughout a students' time at Carleton as they honestly reflect on what they next need to learn, OLM may provide just-in-time access to supplemental materials
4. Reach Constituencies: Reach new and more effectively connect with existing constituencies
  - a. Potentially supplement existing summer "Bridge" programs

- b. Connect current students with alumni who have taken common courses that have shared interests in topical areas thereby fostering “life long learning”
- 5. Profile: Increase Carleton’s profile nationally and locally
  - a. Further build on Carleton’s tradition of developing and/or facilitating the dissemination of quality curricular materials and professional development
  - b. Support our public scholarship initiative and further amplify Carleton’s commitment to public service
  - c. Should development for online learning environments and/or textbook development become a priority for the College, it will be important to address this in recognition and reward system.

Teaching and learning practices and the technologies that support them in online learning environments could be employed by the College to play to our institutional strengths, foster proactive learners, help to connect new and established members of our community, and increase the profile and reputation of Carleton.

### **Institutional Strengths and Position:**

Carleton has significant strengths that translate into relative advantages in comparison to peer institutions. The triad of the Perlman Learning and Teaching Center (LTC), the proximate IdeaLab (pedagogical exploratory space) and Carleton’s associated Coordinated Support Model, and the presence of the Science Education Resource Center (SERC) makes for a particularly powerful combination. Carleton has an institutional culture and the infrastructure that supports the application of learning theory and the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) to Carleton’s educational environment, deep support for course and assignment development, and a successful model of disseminating educational resources in scholarly communities. Any one of these elements could be used to distinguish Carleton from its peers but the combination is even more compelling.

While Carleton has significant institutional resources and expertise on campus, our current faculty and staff have been hired and have had development experiences fine-tuned for classroom teaching. While Carleton has incorporated OLM into face-to-face and blended courses, our labor force is not primed and ready to move into the arena of fully online instruction.

If the College opts to explore fully online courses, we will need to consider prioritizing future faculty development and new hires to reflect our increased interest in this type of instruction and innovation. It would also require thinking about how to “count” this new type of curricular design and delivery as part of regular faculty and staff work. *If the College does opt to pursue fully online courses it will be critical to identify types of expertise and resources required to support our aspirations and whether they best come from consortial partnerships, commercial partnerships, or developed within the Carleton community.*

### **Responses to Specific Groups:**

#### *Advising and Mentoring*

While advising and mentoring often takes place outside of the course context and our working definition of OLM, the tools that support OLM might also be put to use in this domain in four distinct ways. OLM could provide contexts in which we:

- Prompt students to think about their study skills and metacognition through online environments. Writing exercises might be required before arriving on campus and again at a midpoint in their career. This could tie into existing efforts to prompt students to journal which is thought to improve metacognition.
- Deliver an advising curriculum, should the College choose to adopt one, in an OLM environment, e.g. Moodle. A student's site in might include mapping tools used to navigate the curriculum and be used to collect a portfolio of materials germane to advising and mentoring.
- Provide course selection advice for first-year students before they come to campus or more senior students as they register in the evenings. Current students in their junior or senior years might be invited to volunteer for this role. This is akin to exchanges among students in line for registration before our current online registration system.
- Take advantage of the fact that course information is no longer constrained to a print catalog. We should describe our courses more thoroughly so students can make more informed decisions. Incorporate tags, keywords, and perhaps patterns of assignment due dates among the courses they are considering. This would give students the means of going beyond titles, short course descriptions, and word of mouth in selecting courses.

As a group, these uses of OLM have the potential of prompting students to become even more self aware about their learning process, make it easier for first year students to understand the course options available to them in their first term, and make more informed course selection decisions throughout their Carleton careers.

### *Blue Sky*

In consultation with the Blue Sky group, it is clear that there are two particular areas that are most helpful for us to address:

- Promising partnerships in the higher education community to contribute to course development efforts or vet materials developed by others. It will be critical to identify types of expertise and resources required to support our aspirations and whether they best come from consortial partnerships, commercial partnerships, or developed within the Carleton community. One strength Carleton can offer to such partnerships relates to our experience in researching how teaching and support strategies affect student learning.
- The potential creation of an institute for teaching excellence delivered in a blended format. Given the triad of the LTC, IdeaLab/Coordinated Support Model, and SERC mentioned above; Carleton College would be at a particular advantage in drawing colleagues from other institutions for residential experiences focused on teaching excellence. Particularly germane is the LTC's 20 years of experience in running the New Faculty Workshop. Should the proposed institute's program also contain an online elements, we will want to think carefully about the resources and expertise required to sustain the resulting learning community.

As noted in the response to the Competition group, there are promising partnerships available in our sector. The strategic planning process may help us in determining where engagement in additional consortial projects or an institute should fit into our institutional priorities.

### *Competition*

There is a steady stream of headlines in the higher education press relating to individual professors, institutions and consortia developing courses for online delivery. At present, we do not view these as competitive threats to Carleton but rather potential sources of curricular material, supplemental learning resources for existing Carleton students, and potential opportunities for Carleton to engage in meaningful consortial work. Having said that, there are three areas the Competition group might want to consider:

- One of Carleton's competitive advantages is our sustained relationships with our alumni and brand loyalty. OLM might be employed to connect current students with alumni while reinforcing Carleton's role as the "educational home" of our graduates. For example, might the institute for teaching excellence that the Blue Sky group is considering serve to give alumni who are teachers a means of reconnecting with Carleton for intellectual rejuvenation?
- Online learning models function to blur the once distinct lines between course, textbook, and tool development. The College should make explicit our stance with respect to full-scale development of OLM materials or tools. Carleton's traditional stance has been to celebrate faculty members who work with publishers in producing textbooks but we do not provide the infrastructure to support the development of textbooks on campus. Scenarios the group might consider:
  - Faculty teaching Russian in a decade-long project have created their own online textbook and have done high-level application development themselves.
  - In the face of intransigence on the part of a key commercial vendor, the ITS staff have developed a module for Moodle specifically designed for language learning.
- Carleton should continue to stay abreast of consortial efforts in OLM development. The Bryn Mawr consortium is the most prominent example of a consortia developing introductory courses for liberal arts colleges. There have also been concerted, discipline-specific efforts such as the Mellon Foundation's Project Bamboo, or tool-specific efforts such as support and development efforts focused on Moodle.

The sustained connections with alumni and engagement with current students, development of curricular materials and tools, and consortial opportunities all fall well within our existing mission and OLMs are potentially relevant.

### *Curriculum*

Much of our thinking that is directly germane to the Curriculum group is included in the General Principles noted above. Two additional broad topics might also be worth considering:

- The bulk of OLM-related work currently underway at Carleton takes place within Moodle, our institutional course management system. We think the untapped potential of the materials and information in Moodle is potentially vast. How might we use data derived from work in Moodle in addition to our student information system (Colleague) enable us to study our curriculum? Might this provide us with a means of making our curriculum even more responsive to student needs?
- Now that course information is no longer constrained to a print catalog, we should take advantage of this latitude and describe our courses more thoroughly so students can make more informed decisions. Incorporate tags, keywords, and perhaps patterns of assignment due dates among the courses they are considering. This would give students the means of going beyond titles, short course descriptions, and word of mouth as they select courses.

Moodle, an OLM tools already in use at Carleton, might contain information that could help us study our own curriculum or help students to navigate it more effectively.

### **Concluding Thoughts:**

This report is framed in terms of Carleton College's existing institutional mission and the assumptions framing our strategic planning process we believe to be well cast. The framing of OLM in this document is intended to be in keeping with a residential, liberal arts context.

### **Reference:**

Allen, E. and Seaman, J. (2011). Going the Distance: Online Education in the United States. Babson Survey Research Group. Retrieved February 24, 2012, from [http://sloanconsortium.org/publications/survey/going\\_distance\\_2011](http://sloanconsortium.org/publications/survey/going_distance_2011).