Initial Comparator Research – Auburn University

> (LMS = Canvas. Managed by the Office of Information Technology as a central service, with a lot of faculty support from the Instructional Multimedia Group—i.e., the centralized-ish educational technology unit.)

General impression: Auburn University's various colleges remain decentralized and are clearly committed to their local identities, but the ongoing centralization of educational technology services is helping improve the delivery of online degrees as well as helping to create improved conditions for innovation. Auburn still seems unclear as to who their target audience for online is, but have "supporting the residential learning experience" as a fallback option, particularly for undergraduate learning. Online graduate degree programs are clearly promoted as sources of additional revenue for individual colleges. The mission of the continuing education office has been reduced; movement towards online delivery is coming from individual colleges and central educational technology units.

1) What services does this institution's Extension unit provide to campus partners?

> Few—primarily conference support services, via the Office of Professional & Continuing Education. Outward-facing programs at Auburn are housed within University Outreach (http://www.auburn.edu/outreach/), which is overseen by its own Vice President and includes non-credit education, conference services, public service/service learning, faculty in the community, K-12, and OLLI programming, as well as a traditional land-grant-focused Extension Unit.
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> That "classic" Extension service, the Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES; http://www.aces.edu/) is a combined effort of Auburn and Alabama A&M. ACES does run a series of live public webinars that get archived on their YouTube channel and their web site, but does not otherwise run courses itself; topics include law, agriculture, and professional skills. They use Panopto through Auburn to provide these webinars and archive their recordings.
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> Non-credit education programming and conference support is housed in the Office of Professional & Continuing Education (OPCE; http://www.auburn.edu/outreach/opce/). On the education side, OPCE manages professional development training (in 13 areas of interest, including court reporting, K-12 educator CEUs, and real estate), non-credit certificate programs (home inspection, hunger awareness, and interpretation), personal enrichment courses (general education, literacy, standardized test prep), and summer youth programming. This does include online training, more on that below in Question #2.
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> Continuing education is also offered via Auburn Online (http://www.auburn.edu/online/professional_credit.htm), which loosely coordinates offerings from individual centers or colleges within the University.

Overall, Auburn's continuing education efforts definitely have a central home in University Outreach, but there are some serious renegades—which reflects the fact (more on this below) that it is, like UO, resistant to centralization.

2) Where is digital education housed? Are there separate units for online learning and blended or hybrid courses? Are technology and pedagogy combined or separate? How much of this effort is centralized?

Auburn Online (http://www.auburn.edu/online/index.htm) is clearly an effort to provide at least a central portal through which all of their various digital education efforts might be accessed, but in truth, even responsibility for this portal is shared—there are multiple contact e-mails (for units that report to different arms of the institutional organizational chart) at the bottom of the home page.

Right now, online for-credit undergraduate and graduate education is distributed, with different options living within different college or university, loosely coordinated by the office of Distance Learning (http://wp.auburn.edu/biggio/distance-learning/). Different delivery models and vehicles are in place; some options are run through Canvas, while others employ video streaming or other tools. Individual academic units control this programming.

- **Undergraduate** options include:
    - Individual distance courses in biology, geography, math, statistics, and general science, from the College of Sciences and Mathematics (http://www.auburn.edu/academic/cosam/departments/student-services/registration-and-planning/online-learning.htm)
    - Approximately 60 distance courses in the humanities, arts and social sciences, from the College of Liberal Arts (http://cla.auburn.edu/distance/courses/)
    - 2 introductory courses in computing, from the College of Engineering (http://eng.auburn.edu/online/undergraduate-courses/index.html)
    - Selected distance courses in education, health, and counseling from the College of Education (not specified)
    - An online B.S. in Accountancy for second-degree seekers who already hold an undergraduate business degree, offered through the College of Business (http://harbert.auburn.edu/academics/online-programs/bs-in-accountancy-online/index.php). The courses are generally delivered via streaming video of the face-to-face course.
    - 25 undergraduate courses in agronomy, plant science, and poultry science, from the College of Agriculture (http://agriculture.auburn.edu/academics/distance-education/undergraduate-courses/). Some of these courses can be applied to a certificate in aquaculture or soil science.
- **Graduate** options include:
    - 2 master's degrees and one graduate certificate from the College of Human Sciences

- o 9 master's degrees and 1 graduate certificate from the College of Engineering (http://eng.auburn.edu/online/graduate-degrees/index.html)
- o 3 master's degrees in soil science from the College of Agriculture (http://agriculture.auburn.edu/academics/distance-education/graduate-degrees/)
- o A master's degree in real estate development, jointly offered by the Colleges of Architecture and Business (http://mred.auburn.edu/index.php)
- o 7 graduate degrees and one graduate certificate from the College of Business
- o 13 master's degrees from the College of Education (http://www.education.auburn.edu/distance/degrees.html)

Like UO, online undergraduate courses largely appear to serve the residential student population, while graduate courses and degrees appear to serve off-site students. And as you can see, it is a highly variable/distributed experience. While the Distance Learning office is part of an effort to centralize services and promote best practices in digital education (more on this in Questions 3 & 4), it does not exercise control over content or delivery.

The Distance Learning office actually offers one certificate entirely on its own, a Dietary Managers Program that is clearly the legacy of several mergers and/or moves (http://wp.auburn.edu/biggio/dietary-managers-program/). Traditionally offered via correspondence, it is moving online in 2015.

Non-credit online education is funneled through the Office of Professional & Continuing Education. OPCE either partners with, endorses, or offers eleven different options for online non-credit education (http://www.auburn.edu/outreach/opce/online.htm), including:

- Ed4Online, a third-party provider through which Auburn is offering career training and personal enrichment courses in over fifty different topics (https://auburn.ed4online.com)
- The Center for Legal Studies, a third-party provider through which Auburn is offering paralegal certification and additional standalone courses on legal topics, as well as standardized test preparation services (http://www.legalstudies.com/schools/Auburn.html)
- Test preparation courses from their own in-house unit, delivered both face-to-face and synchronously online (http://www.auburn.edu/outreach/opce/testprep/)
- Asynchronously-delivered online certificates for interpreter training, provided by a third-party provider specific to this field (http://www.scsimedia.com/auburn/)
- Selected six-week courses for personal and professional enrichment delivered on a fixed schedule via Ed2Go, another third-party provider (http://www.ed2go.com/au/)
- ProTrain courses in sustainability topics that may be housed within OPCE (https://mell-base.uce.auburn.edu/wconnect/SubGroup.awp?~~SUS~Sustainability+Training)

- Real estate training courses via third-party provider Career WebSchool (http://www.careerwebschool.com/?ernid=1775)
- "Ag Certificate" courses through Auburn's own College of Agriculture (broken link)
- Technical writing courses via third-party provider JER (http://techwriter.coursecatalog.com/default2.aspx?SchoolID=784)
- General professional training via JER—same provider as the technical writing certificate (http://coursecatalog.com/onlinesearch/default.aspx?SchoolID=784)
- Medical billing and related courses through third-party provider Career Step (http://www.careerstep.com/auburn)

Whether partnering with this many different external providers—a move that cedes control over instructors and course quality, at least in most cases—is a revenue-generating move for Auburn is an open question.

3) What structures, formal or informal, are in place to encourage pedagogical innovation on campus? Is there any effort to centralize such activity?

This is a bright spot and may be indicative of recent efforts to centralize services. At Auburn, four service units—Faculty Development, Distance Learning, the Testing Center, and the Instructional Multimedia Group—have been reorganized into the Biggio Center for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (http://wp.auburn.edu/biggio/), a centralized unit which supports faculty and graduate student teachers from across Auburn. While each of these four preexisting units was not terribly innovative on its own, by joining forces they have been able to establish more innovative programming, including a prestigious development program for selected new faculty, an established grant program for local teaching and learning projects, dedicated programming for both graduate students and post-doctoral fellows, and a graduate fellowship program within the center through which experienced graduate student teachers can mentor graduate students new to teaching. In addition to these ongoing programs, there are free professional development seminars open to all instructors, a summer institute that supports redesigning courses for an online or hybrid environment, and an annual in-house conference on teaching and learning. More traditional offerings have continued to be offered here, including exam proctoring and teaching observations, alongside improved support for online course development (more on this below).

Some of this programming may have existed prior to the establishment of the Biggio Center, but it is clear from their web site and their strategic plan (some information available at http://wp.auburn.edu/biggio/about-biggio-center/) that bringing all of these forces together has established a high-energy hub on campus. The Biggio Center has been around for some time, but it is being re-envisioned as an innovative space.

4) Where are instructional design and instructional technology housed? What pathways exist to guide faculty to instructional technology services? Is access to instructional technology support uniform across different faculty groups at the institution?

Instructional technology support is housed at the Biggio Center, specifically within the Instructional Multimedia Group (IMG; http://www.auburn.edu/img/). IMG was originally part of the Office of Information Technology, and still appears in their service catalog (suggesting that some oversight may remain with central IT), but is now physically and to all appearances organizationally housed within the Biggio Center. There is a single pathway to instructional technology, and faculty are clearly being directed there, as it is an explicit part of the Biggio Center's mission. Access to support seems relatively uniform, though it is unclear how adjuncts or non-tenure-track faculty at Auburn would have time or support to make use of the Biggio Center's services.

5) At what administrative level are digital education initiatives, endorsed, supported, or made a fundraising priority? For example, does the institution count, encourage, or otherwise track student enrollment or participation in digitally-inflected (hybrid, blended, tech-enhanced F2F) courses? What institutional investments have been made in hybrid and/or blended learning?

 The Biggio Center was established in 2003, but clearly has grown as Distance Learning and other elements of digital education have become a higher priority for the institution. Recently hired a new director:
 http://ocm.auburn.edu/newsroom/news_articles/2014/08/auburn-university-names-diane-boyd-director-of-the-biggio-center-for-the-enhancement-of-teaching-and-learning.htm

 The job advertisement is also telling, explains how the EdTech unit got absorbed:
 https://chroniclevitae.com/jobs/0000827634-01