

Initial Comparator Research – University of South Carolina

(LMS = Blackboard, <http://blackboard.sc.edu/>, managed by University Technology Services. Continuing Education partners with a third-party vendor to provide online courses; that vendor, Ed2Go (<http://www.ed2go.com/usccoe/>), supplies the virtual environment.)

General impression: In a word, “targeted.” The University is not trying to provide all things to all people. South Carolina’s Continuing Education division provides specific non-credit programs to the community in both online and face-to-face environments; while it has connections to the rest of campus, including the largest standardized test preparation program in the state, its connections to the rest of the campus are limited. Online degree programs and relevant service units are administratively distributed across different university units, with a level of complexity that may deter growth. That said, the Provost’s office is providing leadership in a targeted effort to grow the University’s for-credit online options, and a well-funded Center for Teaching Excellence has helped generate faculty interest in technological and pedagogical innovation. They appear to be in the middle of an effort to centralize, so we may just be seeing the messiness of that transition. South Carolina is something of a cautionary tale, as the reorganization does seem to have further marginalized their Continuing Education division.

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

In addition to non-credit online and face-to-face courses for personal and professional development, Continuing Education and Conferences (<http://saeu.sc.edu/cec/>) provides targeted student services. This includes pre-university programs for academically gifted teens (including a summer session at the Columbia campus, with courses taught by University faculty), preparation courses for standardized tests (including the SAT and ACT, but also the GRE, GMAT, and LSAT), and specialized support for adult learners (though the page that claims this, http://www.sc.edu/study/academic_overview/continuing_education/, provides a dead link for the potential adult learner who seeks further information).

Continuing Education provides online courses and professional certificates through a third party vendor, Ed2Go (<http://www.ed2go.com>), with courses taught by an adjunct pool of working professionals. While Ed2Go claims their content comes from the University of South Carolina’s College of Education, there is nothing to suggest that this is true today; the College of Education’s web site claims that their online education efforts happen through the University, and the courses offered through South Carolina’s Ed2Go portal are clearly meant for personal and professional development, rather than for degree-seekers.

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?

Online education at the University of South Carolina is partially centralized, and efforts are trending in that direction as part of a larger reorganization of their statewide public

university system. All of their for-credit classes are offered via Blackboard, but often include some live sessions, offered via Adobe Connect. So there's technological consistency, but not administrative consistency: right now, the organizational home of an online, for-credit class depends on the context in which it is being offered.

Online bachelor's degrees are offered through the University of South Carolina's Palmetto College (<http://palmettocollege.sc.edu/>). Palmetto College is a relatively recent reorganization within the University of South Carolina System; a Palmetto College Chancellor was first named in January of 2013. Palmetto College currently encompasses four associate degree-granting campuses—USC Lancaster, USC Salkehatchie, USC Sumter, and USC Union—and online bachelor's degree completion programs. A specific college or department at a particular USC bachelor's degree-granting campus sponsors each major available to online bachelor's degree students. Current programs include bachelor's degrees in business administration (sponsored by USC Aiken), human services (USC Beaufort, criminal justice and an RN-BSN program (USC Upstate), and elementary education, liberal studies, and organizational leadership (USC Columbia), for a total of 7 online undergraduate degrees.

Online graduate degrees, however, are offered and marketed separately (<http://gradonline.sc.edu>), through the Graduate School at the University of South Carolina's flagship campus in Columbia. These include 30 degree programs (largely either fully online or hybrid/low-residency master's degrees, though several doctorates are also offered) and 7 certificate programs.

Finally, individual academic departments at the University of South Carolina offer online courses on an ad-hoc basis. These are developed by the departments themselves. (For example, the School of the Environment is offering a spring term course on the Natural History of South Carolina, <http://magnesium.csd.sc.edu/dl/courses/courseweb.php?id=4314>.) Apart from established online degree programs, however, few academic departments at South Carolina currently offer extensive online courses. A total of 192 courses are being offered in the spring semester, but the vast majority of them are for those students doing all their coursework online.

All three avenues, however, receive at least some degree of technical support from the Office of Distributed Learning Support Services (<http://www.sc.edu/dl/index.html>). DL manages the distribution of courses via Blackboard, Adobe Connect, DVD, or online video. (South Carolina's Media Services unit, which is part of University Technology Services, manages a dedicated private streaming service at <http://video.sc.edu>. DL connects students and faculty with that service as needed.) DL provides faculty support in the form of Logistics Coordinators, who assist those faculty who are creating courses for distributed learning, but it doesn't provide dedicated pedagogical support. Neither does University Technology Services (<http://uts.sc.edu/index.shtml>). While UTS is clearly the local tech helpdesk for students and faculty, and its web site suggests that it has staff on hand to provide instructional design support and training (<http://www.uts.sc.edu/academic/instructionaldesign/>), there's nothing to suggest that it is

a priority within that unit. Both DL and UTS are quick to refer faculty to the Center for Teaching Excellence (<http://www.sc.edu/cte/>). So while some pedagogical support is available, it is not embedded in the units that handle online course delivery.

A quick look at the organizational chart for the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost at South Carolina (http://www.sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/provost/docs/provostorgchart.pdf) highlights the distributed nature of services. University Technology Services is a unit within the Division of Information Technology (http://www.sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/division_of_information_technology/), which is headed by the CIO/Vice President for Information Technology). In contrast, the director of Distributed Learning Support Services reports to the Senior Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School (despite providing support for both undergraduate and graduate courses), and the director of the Center for Teaching Excellence reports to the Senior Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Studies. Finally, Continuing Education and Conference Services reports to yet another Vice Provost. While all of these units do live within Academic Affairs, reporting to the Provost of the University, their overlapping needs and differing chains of command suggest that quite a lot of local cooperation is needed to make things happen.

This does not even begin to include Palmetto College and its degree-completion offerings; the Palmetto College organizational chart (<http://saeu.sc.edu/chancellor/OrgChart.pdf>) makes it clear that this reorganization has complicated cross-connections between that unit and the units at the flagship campus which provide technical and logistical support, and has perhaps further marginalized the role of Continuing Education on the Columbia campus.

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

Despite the distributed nature of South Carolina's administrative units, there is energy within the Provost's office to ramp up distributed learning offerings. To that end, the Provost is currently offering grants of up to \$8000 to South Carolina faculty (both at the flagship and at regional campuses) who will revamp their courses for digital delivery (http://www.sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/provost/faculty/grants/distributedlearning.php).

Pedagogical support at the University of South Carolina is housed within the Center for Teaching Excellence (<http://www.sc.edu/cte/>). This unit is relatively centralized and well funded, and offers many events for graduate students and faculty on the Columbia (flagship) campus. It provides faculty training on pedagogical practices, integrative learning, distributed learning, and flipped classrooms. A significant amount of attention is given to teaching with technology; in the distributed learning track alone there are nine events for the spring 2015 semester, covering everything from developing digital humanities curricula, to using technology for student engagement, to copyright basics for faculty. CTE also has an instructional design team that conducts one-on-one faculty

consultations and provides training, and the office's resource library (<http://www.sc.edu/cte/resources.php>) is extensive. They are invested in promoted flipped classrooms to USC faculty, and this semester are offering a faculty discussion group on active learning (http://www.sc.edu/cte/Spring2015/FLIP_Faculty_Discussion_Group.php).

Overall, CTE is the home of teaching with technology. This divorces the distributed learning unit from best practices in terms of teaching and design, but also gives faculty a clear place to get started.

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?

University Technology Services claims to offer instructional design consultations and instructional technology training, but what is offered is generally technology-specific. They have some resources on their web site for faculty to look at but it is not clear who might provide further one-on-one support. Distributed Learning Support Services does provide faculty support when it comes to the logistics of implementing an online course, particularly one that makes use of video or of both synchronous and asynchronous elements. But the most cohesive faculty support comes through the Center for Teaching Excellence, which offers extensive workshops, and staff dedicated to helping faculty transition to teaching through distributed learning. CTE does seem to reach all faculty groups across the institution. It is not housed within a specific school or college.

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 Provost is offering grants to ease the transition to hybrid learning or distributed learning models. That, combined with the establishment of Palmetto College as the home for online undergraduate degrees, suggests that digital education is more of a priority at the University of South Carolina than it has been in the past. They seem to be interested in both encouraging individual faculty to invest time in transitioning to this model, and in developing targeted degree-completion programs that have an in-state audience. They've also moved heavily into online graduate education. There is more of an institutional interest in blended learning or multi-modal learning here than there has been at other institutions thus far.