

Chapter Six: Request to Offer Degree Programs Online

The Proposed Change in Educational Offerings

In accordance with the Higher Learning Commission's policy 1.C.2.b, which requires accredited institutions to seek approval for changes to educational offerings, Roosevelt University is hereby formally requesting an extension of its accreditation to include fully online degree programs.

Consistent with its mission and the 2003 Strategic Plan, Roosevelt has encouraged the growth of RU Online, the University's fully online division, so that Roosevelt's distinctive educational offerings may be increasingly available to populations who cannot attend campus-based courses. When RU Online developed unique online certificate programs, Roosevelt became a member of the University Center of Lake County and the Illinois Virtual Campus and, thereby, extended these programs to students throughout Illinois.

One of populations that Roosevelt seeks to serve is community college students who wish to complete an undergraduate degree. To this end, Roosevelt has sought to develop partnerships with many of the community colleges in the northwest suburbs and beyond. At this time, Roosevelt has secured agreements with the College of DuPage, Elgin Community College, and McHenry County College. Online programming plays a significant role in these partnerships because of geographic distance and because of the targeted working adult population.

Roosevelt also seeks to increase accessibility to current academic programs and their student populations by offering these programs online. Specifically, students in the Graduate Program in Training and Development find it increasingly difficult to come to a physical campus on a regular schedule because their profession requires extensive travel. Similarly, adult students in the Bachelor of Professional Studies program, especially management professionals and public servants with demanding and fluctuating schedules, are well-served by online programming.

In addition to serving new populations, the fully online courses that are offered through RU Online increase the ability of Roosevelt's campus-based students to make progress toward completing their requirements. Students whose work schedules or other life demands prevent them from traveling to campus during a given term are often able to continue their program of study by enrolling in a fully online course. RU Online also makes it possible for students who have relocated to complete their Roosevelt University degrees. In this way, RU Online enhances the University's efforts at improving retention and graduation rates and fulfills the first goal of the Strategic Plan, "focus on student success."

It was anticipated from the inception of RU Online that high quality educational opportunities delivered online would not only further the University’s mission of outreach but also increase enrollments by attracting students from a broader geographic area. In this way, RU Online has, even in its early days, enhanced the University’s financial strength as well as supported its mission. Table 1 demonstrates the progress that RU Online has made in its short history.

Table 1
RU Online Enrollments
2002-2005

ITEM	FY02	FY03	FY04	FY05
Number of students enrolled in online courses	307	990	1,699	1,947
Number of enrolled sections	23	54	89	104
Credit hours of instruction	1,077	3,124	5,498	6,615

Factors Leading to the Proposed Change

Broad participation from the University community resulted in the initial planning and grant proposal that ultimately became RU Online. Institutional leaders, including the president, provost, chief financial officer, deans, and advancement officer considered the importance of providing education via a delivery system appropriate to the 21st century. This extended a long-standing mission of outreach previously achieved through a print-based guided independent study program that remains active today. Members of the University’s Information Technology Policy Committee were also involved in the initial decision making, and academic department chairs and faculty have played a central role in developing online courses that adhere to the learning objectives of the campus-based programs.

Two University leaders developed a Strategic Plan for RU Online that detailed the mission, infrastructure needs, potential markets, plan for implementation, and quality assurance measures. In addition, they authored Course Development Guidelines guided by the quality benchmarks available to them at the time: a document crafted by the NEA and Blackboard, the Sloan-C Foundation Pillars of Excellence, and research from Carol Twigg and the Center for Academic Transformation. When the “Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs” were adopted by the eight regional accrediting commissions, the developers of RU Online found that their Guidelines were consistent with the best practices detailed in that document. The core values of RU Online have, therefore, been consistent with those of the accrediting bodies from the beginning. These values include community, interactivity, coherence, clearly defined learning outcomes, emphasis on assessment, and access to support services. Since its inception, RU Online has focused on teaching and learning rather than on technology, and it continues to center on best practices in online pedagogy.

Although the beginnings of RU Online preceded the approval of the 2003 Strategic Plan, the success of the program, launched in the Fall 2001 semester, is reflected in the several objectives in the current plan related to online learning.

Objectives from the 2003 Strategic Plan	
Objective 2.9	Assure the continuous use of technology to enhance learning and scholarship.
Objective 3.6	Become an economic, social, and cultural catalyst for Roosevelt’s surrounding communities through academic and civic partnerships.
Objective 3.7	Expand laddered learning opportunities, such as two-plus-two bachelor’s degree completion programs at selected community colleges
Objective 3.8	Expand programming for RU Online
Objective 4.3	Identify and market distinctive programs at appropriate sites by assessing which programs can be optimally offered exclusively at one location or one time and which can be offered efficiently at multiple locations and/or times and/or online.
Objective 4.5	Expand distance learning content and delivery capability.
Objective 5.7	Maximize in time and in space the use of the University’s physical and online assets.
Objective 6.7	Develop and execute specific regional, then national and international recruitment plans for targeted student markets, considering both campus-based and online delivery.
Objective 7.1	Develop a strategic, integrated alumni communications program, including print, online, and in person.

The initial funds for development of online courses at Roosevelt were provided by a two-year grant from the McCormick Tribune Foundation. In each year, the grant provided \$250,000 to cover the start-up costs of developing the expertise and the technology to offer distance learning opportunities of the highest quality. The program experienced early success both in enrollments and in reputation. The quality of the courses that have been offered through RU Online has been recognized on a national level and has quickly become the standard to which other institutions aspire (see Afterword).

In recognition of the contribution that RU Online was making to Roosevelt’s mission and financial stability, the University assumed support of the program when the grant expired. Table 2 shows appropriations from the University’s operating budget since 2003.

Table 2
Appropriations from University Budget
2003-2006

Fiscal Year	Appropriation from University's Operating Budget to Support RU Online
2003	\$208,911
2004	\$434,969 (16 months)
2005	\$393,935
2006	\$469,527

As RU Online has grown in number and depth of offerings since 2001, the program has moved from individual course offerings to online certificates in organizational leadership (undergraduate) and training and development, instructional design, consulting skills, and e-learning (graduate). Most recently, a Master of Arts in Training and Development and a Bachelor of Professional Studies (BPS) with a major in organizational leadership have been developed through RU Online. Course development for these degree programs was completed in academic year 2004-2005.

Roosevelt is now seeking extension of its accreditation to existing online degree programs and to all online degree programs that may be offered in the future. RU Online first developed degree programs in training and development and organizational leadership because surveys of online students, as well as enrollment patterns in existing online courses, indicated a demand for these programs. Preliminary conversations with community colleges have confirmed that the Bachelor of Professional Studies in organizational leadership was a wise choice, even for more traditional-age students, as it meets the educational goals and professional aspirations of students who have started their college careers in a two-year program.

Plans for new online degree programs in the near future include an undergraduate major in criminal justice leadership, to be offered through the Bachelor of Professional Studies program in Fall 2006, followed by a graduate program in arts leadership, to be offered through the Chicago College of Performing Arts. RU Online has established development guidelines, processes, policies, and standards that provide a strong basis on which to develop additional online degree programs. Subsequent development of online programming will proceed cautiously and strategically, with careful attention to market potential and to quality factors in development, implementation, and assessment.

Approvals to Implement the Proposed Change

Internal approval for undergraduate degree programs at Roosevelt is granted by the relevant college council and reviewed by the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee. Graduate programs must have the approval of the relevant college council and the University's Graduate Council.

The courses that have been offered through RU Online available in traditional classroom-based settings; therefore, no additional curricular approval has been necessary. However, RU Online's Quality Assurance Cycle requires that development of new online courses involve collaboration between the academic unit for content and online experts for course design. The course development contract requires a signature by the academic program director and the college dean, guaranteeing a cooperation between the academic unit, the college, and the course designer.

The Office of the Provost has collaborated with the staff of RU Online in developing policies for administrative responsibility, faculty compensation, teaching load, and course ownership. The University added a new section entitled "Technology and Intellectual Property Policies" to the *Faculty Manual* in 2001 to record and institutionalize these policies.

When Roosevelt first undertook development of online courses, the University made inquiries about external approvals by the Illinois Board of Higher Education and North Central Association's Higher Learning Commission. It was the University's understanding at that time that only new programs designated for online development required such approval. This impression, with respect to regulations of the Higher Learning Commission, was corrected in November of 2004, when Diane Nyhammer, then Roosevelt's liaison to HLC, informed the University that online degree programs constitute a change to educational offerings and require special approval. Because the comprehensive review was on the horizon, Nyhammer advised the Self-Study Steering Committee to include a request to extend accreditation to online degree programs as part of the Self-Study document.

In discussing the possibility of degree completion partnerships with community colleges outside of Roosevelt's IBHE regions, the University is aware that approval for such degree programs must be sought from the State and is proceeding with that process. In addition to outside regulatory agencies, the staff of RU Online is mindful of legal requirements that apply to all academic programs. In this spirit, the staff of RU Online has worked closely with the staff of the University Library to understand copyright rules and restrictions for materials copied in online courses (see core component 1e).

The Impact of the Proposed Change on Challenges Identified by the Commission in 1996

The development of online courses at Roosevelt has already had a positive impact on four of the challenges identified in the Commission's 1996 report.

The university must continue its efforts to raise outside funds for endowment, reserves, and general operations: As mentioned above, the McCormick Tribune Foundation awarded Roosevelt University \$500,000 to develop RU Online over a two-year period. This outside funding enabled the University not only to create fully online courses but also to test a course management system without investment of University operating funds. This system, Blackboard, is now widely used by the faculty for both online course delivery and support for campus-based courses. Because the University invested in integrating Blackboard with the Banner student information system, all campus-based courses have been automatically provided with a Blackboard course management site since Spring of 2005. Many of the logistical problems that have plagued commuter students and their teachers in the past have been ameliorated by the faculty's ability to post syllabi, assignments, instructions, and other vital materials online. Asynchronous discussions of course topics have also helped create community and continuity in courses that may meet face-to-face only one time per week.

The institution must continue its efforts of communicating and implementing its plan for "one university-two-campus" uniformly across all units: Online options ease the demands on a multi-campus environment. Through fully online offerings, students on either campus may complete their academic programs in a more timely manner. Academic programs with limited resources rotate online courses into their schedules, alleviating the need to offer all courses on both campuses every semester. Online programming also reduces classroom seat time, making more efficient use of existing classroom space and better meeting the needs of specific student populations. Additionally, clubs and organizations, and University committees post information about their activities via Blackboard. The graduate program in training and development, for example, uses Blackboard for its Training and Development Network where students and alumni find information about the profession, conferences, and career opportunities.

The university needs to continue to give attention to full- and part-time compensation issues, such as salary compensation and gender equity, enhance faculty opportunities, and address faculty workloads: RU Online negotiated compensation for online course development and teaching prior to launching any online initiative. Compensation rates were based on an environmental scan of established practices and implemented without regard to whether a faculty member is full-time or part-time. Online teaching is part of a full-time faculty member's regular teaching load; so no additional compensation is required. A contract with the adjunct faculty union sets forth compensation rates for part-time faculty. The University and the union recognize online

teaching as part of the normal teaching load of one to two courses for part-time faculty.

Teaching online courses through RU Online is an enhancement to faculty opportunities by providing some of the same freedom from time and space that online learning provides to the students. More importantly, it allows faculty to participate in a new pedagogy and stay current with technology. RU Online provides support for faculty who undertake development and/or teaching of online courses by providing support for instructional design and other professional assistance to assure that new courses are developed with the same high standards for which the program has earned its reputation. RU Online also offers training in the use of technology and online pedagogy to all interested Roosevelt faculty each semester at each campus. The newly established Center for Teaching and Learning will further expand this type of learning opportunity for the faculty.

There is barely sufficient instructional and programmatic support, including clerical, computing, library services, media development, and laboratory preparation: RU Online staff has responded effectively to the faculty's need for technical support. They are available to faculty for individual and group training and have prepared documents outlining processes and standards. They have also included information and online support for faculty on the RU Online website. http://faculty.roosevelt.edu/ruonline/faculty_main.htm

Courses offered through RU Online provide students with electronic access to libraries, tutorials, technical support, and many other vital support services. These electronically accessible resources ease the pressure on faculty and help to alleviate the demand for resources at both campuses.

Overall, the impact of RU Online has been positive in responding to some of the challenges detailed in the 1996 report. The University anticipates that these positive contributions will continue as the program grows and that faculty and students will reap ongoing benefits from the convenience and effectiveness of this successful program.

The University's Plans to Implement and Sustain the Change

When RU Online was first implemented, faculty and staff with expertise and experience in online pedagogy and programming were engaged to launch the effort. Now, dedicated staff with expertise in educational technology and instructional design support the program; and faculty and program directors with content area expertise oversee program development and delivery. The knowledge of these experts combined with specific evaluation and oversight measures assures that the program's academic quality will be upheld and the comparability with campus-based delivery will be maintained. Students and faculty in RU Online classes evaluate the online learning experience at the midpoint and end of each semester. Evaluations address issues related to courseware, learning effectiveness, and support as well as more traditional areas. RU Online uses

responses to these evaluations as part of their assessment efforts and continuous improvement cycle.

RU Online has a dedicated administrative staff including the associate provost for academic programs and faculty development, an associate director and instructional designer, a program specialist focused on the technical aspects of the program, and a part-time recruiter. The vice provost for continuing education provides overall oversight for the program. The leaders of individual academic units are responsible for their online offerings including scheduling courses, assigning faculty, assessment of learning outcomes, and academic integrity. RU Online is responsible for assessing programmatic effectiveness. Accountability for online programming is the same as that for other programs at Roosevelt. Online programs must demonstrate that students are achieving the learning outcomes established by departmental faculty, and programs must demonstrate fiscal responsibility and accountability for appropriated funds.

Online students enjoy access to all of the administrative, academic, and support services that are available to students on campus. Online students may access institutional resources, including the library, registration, calendar of events and e-mail through the RU Online portal. Through Roosevelt's homepage and the RU Online homepage, students may access all University offices as well as faculty advisors. The RU Online office serves as a single point of contact for online students. Students are served either directly through that office, or they are put in contact with other University personnel who can meet their needs.

The University has made a commitment to RU Online in its annual planning and budget cycle and in its current Strategic Plan. This commitment on the part of the University has been answered by the commitment of RU Online to become a self-sustaining program capable of funding its own program growth. Towards this end, RU Online has been entrepreneurial in identifying programs that bring both distinction and enrollment to the University. Two degree programs—a major in organizational leadership, offered through the Bachelor of Professional Studies Fast Track program, and the Master of Arts in Training and Development—were completed in 2004-2005; and further degree programs are anticipated, provided the Higher Learning Commission grants accreditation to existing and future programs. One area where a significant number of public servants have expressed interest is criminal justice leadership. Often these individuals, many of them police officers and public safety officers, cannot participate in traditional classroom-based programs because their work schedules are unpredictable. For these people, an online degree program is ideal, and Roosevelt plans to meet their needs. The University anticipates that such an online degree program in criminal justice leadership would not only meet an educational need in the community but also contribute to the University's revenues and fulfill the University's mission of social justice by enabling it to reach out to underserved individuals nationally.

The University's Strategies for Evaluating the Change

Student populations: The University will continue to assess the extent to which the online programs are attracting new student populations and increasing overall enrollment. Table 3 shows the number of students that have enrolled out of area (over 20 miles from either campus), out of state, and out of the country.

Table 3
RU Online Out-of-Area Students
2001-2005

Area	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005
In-state, out of area	40	131	220	280
Out of state	23	45	105	161
Out of country	1	0	0	5
TOTAL	64	176	325	446

In addition to new out-of-area populations, RU Online has attracted new local populations that would not otherwise have been able to avail themselves of Roosevelt's curriculum. Police officers are a case in point. Because of their intra-semester schedule changes, only the most senior officers would be able to commit to Roosevelt's sixteen-week on campus schedule of classes. However, the flexibility of RU Online courses has made Roosevelt University an attractive choice for police officers in the Chicago area.

In 2004-2005 the University conducted a survey of part-time students who did not continue their enrollment at Roosevelt. The results of this survey suggested that the University's ability to retain students would be enhanced if there were additional courses and programs available through RU Online. Former students reported that life changes, such as relocation or birth of a child, resulted in discontinuing their studies at Roosevelt. Others reported that greater flexibility in scheduling would have enabled them to make uninterrupted progress in their programs. RU Online addresses the needs of these part-time students, enabling them to continue their Roosevelt University educations without interruption.

Creating and sustaining student populations require strong academic programming, and the RU Online Quality Assurance Cycle includes regular review of existing courses that results in maintaining, revising, or deleting individual courses from the inventory of course offerings. RU Online also pays close attention to the results of surveys such as the National Survey of Student Engagement, Student Satisfaction Survey, student evaluations, and repeater rates to assess the success of the courses from the students' perspective.

Standards: Standards and assessment have been part of RU Online since the beginning. In the development stage, the planners used criteria established by the National Education Association and Blackboard, Inc. When Sloan-C established their Pillars of Excellence, the program keyed to those elements (student satisfaction, access, learning effectiveness, faculty satisfaction, institutional cost effectiveness) and addressed those attributes in the evaluation cycle. Shortly thereafter, the eight regional accrediting commissions established criteria, Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs. RU Online has aligned its efforts with those guidelines since then.

In Academic Year 2004-2005, a University-wide Distance Learning Committee adopted standards for Internet-based distance learning. These standards address learning outcomes, the technology mix, interactivity, the syllabus, course content and structure, and consistency. The Committee approved a standards checklist to help online course developers and faculty focus on the Roosevelt University standards for online course work.

Assessment: The RU Online Guidelines and Checkpoint documents emphasize the delineation of learning outcomes, and such delineation is required for course approval. RU Online compares student outcomes in online courses with that of students in Roosevelt’s campus-based courses (as well as to national averages) to ensure that there is no discrepancy between online and campus-based delivery.

Students in online courses evaluate teaching effectiveness using the same instrument as that which the Senate adopted for University-wide use. These evaluations are processed through the University’s central administration in exactly the same way as evaluations for campus-based courses. RU Online uses an additional program-specific instrument at the midpoint and end of the semester to assess program effectiveness and student perception of learning.

Comparisons for fall and spring semesters from Fall 2001 through Spring 2004 revealed similar results between online and on-campus courses.

	RU Online	On-Campus
Course completion rate	94.5%	96.4%
Courses completed with grade of C or better	84.9%	89.8%

The degree programs, like the certificate programs, and individual course offerings, will continue these strategies for assessment and continuously seek to improve the assessment of online offerings. The Graduate Program in Training and Development, for example, completed a study in 2005 comparing performance in their initial course between online and traditional classroom sections. The results indicate a slightly better performance by the online students. This study examined 112 graduate students who completed an introductory courses in the Graduate Program in Training and Development in on-campus and online formats. The study revealed no significant difference in learning between

campus-based and online formats although the online students found the course work more challenging, However, the results indicated that online learners enjoyed the courses to a significantly higher degree and also found the courses more useful than their counterparts in classroom-based courses.

Further evidence of the effectiveness of online teaching was provided by a sociology professor who taught two sections of the Sociology 290 The Research Process, in the same semester—one section online and the other campus-based. He noted a marked difference in performance between the students in the two sections and observed that the online students read more supplemental materials, engaged in more and deeper discussion, and out-performed the campus-based students. Table 4 shows the mean scores of students in the two sections on two projects, three assignments, and six quizzes.

Table 4
Mean Scores of Students
in Classroom and Online Sections of Sociology 290

Mean Scores of Students in two sections of Sociology 290 Research Process		
	campus-based section	online section
Projects	18.47	21.1
Assignments	8.20	8.27
Quizzes	6.18	7.15

The Bachelor of Professional Studies Fast Track Degree Program uses a cross-grading process in its Senior Thesis course to assess student learning. Thus far, the program has found no difference in student performance in online and campus-based classes.

In ways such as those detailed above, RU Online measures the effectiveness of the online format with the traditional classroom-based format. Thus far, the results have affirmed that online students fare as well as and, in some cases, better than students in time-sanctioned settings.

An Afterword

Roosevelt is pleased with the success that RU Online has achieved in five short years both in the number and types of courses that are now offered fully online and in the additional enrollments that benefit both students in achieving their goals and the University in maintaining fiscal stability. That said, the most significant aspect of RU Online and that of which the University is most proud is

the recognition that RU Online has received for the excellence of its courses and programs.

In December of 2002, the CEO of Blackboard identified Roosevelt's RU Online as an exemplary program. The Futures Project at Brown University had asked him to identify institutions where the effort to use technology showed promise. In 2004, Blackboard chose RU Online as a case study to present as a model of excellence in pedagogy and fiscal responsibility at its 2004 Users' Conference. Also in 2004, *Training and Development Magazine*, the main publication of the American Society for Training and Development, recognized RU Online as one of six exemplars in online training and development programs.

An article by Dan Carnevale in the February 4, 2005, issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reported on a recent survey that concluded the following: "The distance-education programs that offer entire degrees online are more successful than those that offer only a scattering of courses. . . .Online degree programs lead to success. . .because they tend to highlight a college's overall mission and translate into more institutional support for the faculty members and students working online." (vol. 51, issue 22, p. A31)

With the increasing popularity of online degree programs across the country and the outstanding progress that RU Online has made thus far, Roosevelt is eager to have its accreditation extended to include existing and future fully online degree programs. The leaders of RU Online are also grateful for the opportunity to consult with the site visitors and benefit from their expertise and experience in online education.