

# General Information

## History

In 1999, the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia (USG), in collaboration with its institutions, began developing a fully online set of courses that would allow a student to complete core curriculum courses in Areas A-E for science and non-science majors. eCore became an award-winning, high quality, accessible set of interactive online courses that meet defined learning outcomes. eCore courses may be offered by any USG institution, taken by any USG students, and taught by any USG faculty member. *(From 2000-2006 Factbook)*

## Why Collaboration?

eCore serves as a successful example for collaboratively delivering education in the online environment. It has evolved from being a small, early start-up collaboration (the first in the USG), to a growing model studied carefully by other systems. In FY 2010, it became a fully scalable, self-sustaining program marked by high student retention and satisfaction, proven course quality and outcomes, and renewed interest.

The hallmarks of its present and future operation are:

### Providing increased institutional capacities for full online programs.

\*While most USG institutions offer online courses, the vast majority of these are unable (due to lack of resources or faculty interest) to offer all areas of the core courses online. Without the /full/ core online, institutions cannot offer full undergraduate

degree programs online, and thus lose students to more expensive, proprietary institutions. Also, institutions that do offer online core courses often require at least one face-to-face meeting in these courses, whereas eCore courses do not.

## Key Benefits

- Provides *full* online core curriculum, whereas most institutions are only able to provide some courses.
- eCore is completely self-sustaining, requiring no state appropriations
- Efficient, scalable and consistent student services, course design and teaching.

### Efficient Funding & Model Operations

- Among other (almost 90) collaborative programs across the United States, eCore is one of only a few that is completely self-sustaining, requiring no state appropriations.
- Institutions offering eCore courses receive 20-40 percent (varies based on withdrawals) of eCore tuition dollars, but have no faculty or course development costs; thus these collaborative enrollments are beneficial for affiliate institutions.
- eCore relies on centralized administrative services (unduplicated at institutions). These include course development and revisions, faculty development and support, identification and follow-up of at-risk students, student success initiatives, student orientations, non-technical call center, tutoring services, data analysis, bookstore, and marketing.

### Enrollment Management

- eCore course sections are analyzed on a daily basis during the registration periods to provide for the optimum number of course sections. Almost all sections of eCore were managed so that enrollments were sufficient to cover instructional costs. At the same time, less than a dozen students were unable to register for an eCore course due to a course being full.
- Institutions delivering courses via eCore are able to successfully utilize eCore for students who need core courses but have no courses available due to excess capacity.

### **Professional Faculty Development**

eCore Administrative Services provides eCore instructors with a certification course before they teach online (beginning in FY 2010). Certification includes participation in an online course as a student, as well as comprehensive learning experiences relating to technology, online teaching, faculty expectations, community building, and the role of the instructor in student support. Ongoing support includes mentoring programs, an online community, an annual meeting, and webinars.

- Many instructors who teach through eCore take their skills back to their institutions, where they develop and teach higher-level online courses and mentor other faculty.

### **Consistent Quality Courses**

- All eCore courses meet and exceed the rigorous requirements for a 5-Star Online Course (developed by UWG and based on principles of good practice).
- All eCore courses are evaluated and substantially revised by teams of eCore faculty every three years. Smaller revisions take place on an ongoing basis.
- All eCore faculty agree to engage in specific practices that enhance student learning and success, including: high visibility in courses, quick responsiveness and grading, quality feedback, and identification of at-risk students.

### **High Student Retention**

- eCore Administrative Services is staffed with individuals who are highly trained and have experience with the needs of online students, which are usually markedly different than those of on-campus students.
- One of the major criticisms of eCore five years ago (poor retention) has all but disappeared with the formal system that has been put in place, first at the University of West Georgia (in 2007), and across eCore in 2010. eCore retention (course completion) has increased from 68 percent in 2005 to 82 percent in 2010, and continues to climb, with Summer 2010 having an 89 percent retention rate.

- The increases in retention are due to: a gated registration system for eCore students which requires demonstrated understanding of the nature of the courses; identification of at-risk students (by eCore faculty and administrators) and highly intensive follow-up of these students (by eCore advisors/administrators); faculty training as to the role of the instructor in student success; more student-friendly navigation within courses; and ongoing evaluation of student withdrawal surveys and other data.

### **Growth and Scalability**

- Double-digit growth in students served and demand for services results in more quality choices for non-traditional students. A growing number of students taking eCore courses are transfers from proprietary institutions.
- The improved financial model provides incentives for institutions to become affiliates or to provide faculty.
- Through ongoing data collection and analysis, eCore administrative services aggressively identifies the changing needs of both member institutions and student populations, and evolves accordingly.

Administrative support for the program has been provided by the University of West Georgia since June 2009.