FY21 Annual Report

Center for Distance Education
Annual Report
December 2021

Introduction

The Center for Distance Education (CDE) staff is committed to contributing to institutional strategic initiatives, including Maverick excellence, diversity, and sustainability. The CDE team collaborates with campus colleagues every day to ensure constant progress and improvement of online education and all related strategic goals. The CDE is committed to the strategic initiatives, collaboration across administrative departments and colleges, and overall ongoing support of UTA's robust online education programs.

Online Education at UTA

Overview

Online education at The University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) is both unique and extensive. Tasked with supporting the development and delivery of high quality online education, the Center for Distance Education (CDE) provides a variety of services (Appendix A), including but not limited to: LMS course shells to supplement and enhance campus courses, courses facilitated completely online, online degree programs offered on a traditional semester-based schedule, accelerated online programs, and online learning consortium courses in partnership with other universities in the University of Texas System.

Growth

From humble beginnings, online education at UTA has grown exponentially. In the 2020-2021 academic year, UTA offered 11,968 online courses with 34,276 students fully online; moreover,a total of 57,845 students took at least one online course during the academic year. The entire core curriculum at UTA is available online, and the institution offers undergraduate and graduate programs in specified disciplines in a completely online format.

Online Student Growth
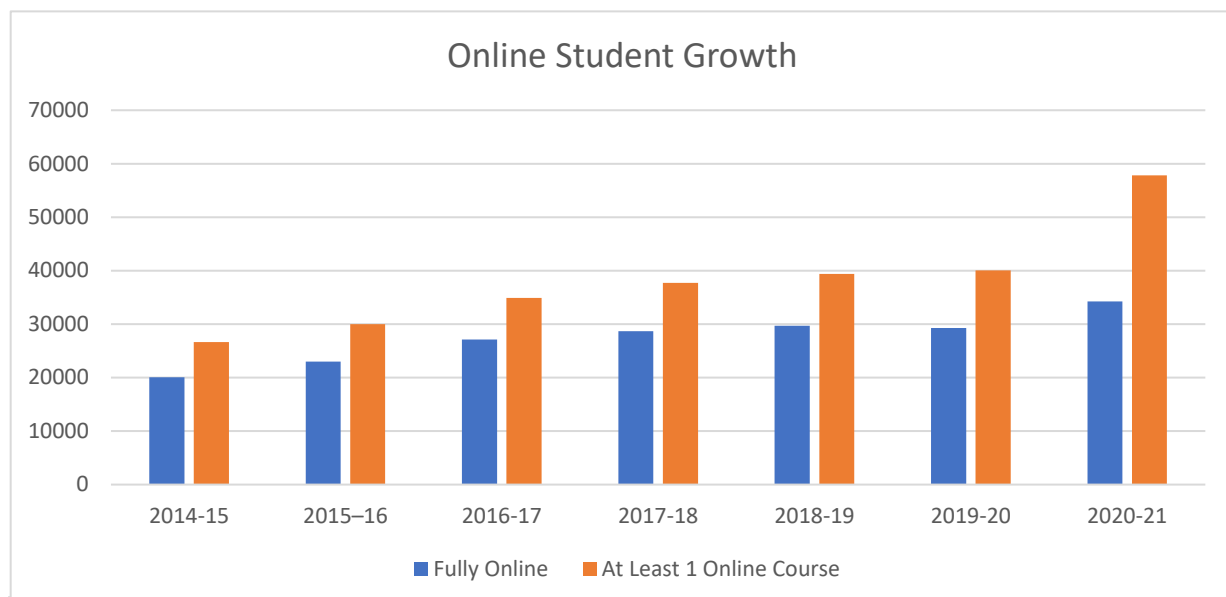
For the academic year 2020-2021, UTA delivered at least one online course to 57,845 students. This represents 95.2% of the overall student enrollment of 60,745 for the academic year. "Online course" in these metrics means courses intentionally planned as fully online.

Ongoing Pandemic Response

In FY 2021, the CDE staff continued to demonstrate Maverick excellence, unprecedented teamwork, collaboration, and leadership during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. CDE juggled various priorities in order to provide the staff and resources necessary to ensure the success of online education for our UTA students, faculty, and staff.

UTA's Center for Distance Education

The Center for Distance Education (CDE) was founded in 1997 with a staff of three half-time employees and has since grown to meet the increasing demand for online offerings. CDE now hosts eleven full-time positions providing a full range of services to support faculty, staff, and students in online academic programming.

Overview

CDE provides centralized assistance and support for UTA's online education offerings. In coordination with the colleges, and other campus administrative offices; CDE helps to ensure online course quality and the best possible online learning experience at UTA. To that end, CDE is comprised of highly trained instructional designers, an experienced trainer, an online programming and policy manager, and instructional technology specialists to support faculty and students in their online and hybrid courses.

The Center is a nationally recognized leader of quality online education grounded in sound pedagogy, centered on service to students and faculty, committed to building effective online learning communities, and delivered through UTA's designated LMS. CDE partners with faculty seeking excellence in teaching online and hybrid courses through assessment and national standards for academic quality online and serves as a catalyst to transitioning traditional teaching and learning methods to the online environment.

Awards

As a leader in production of quality online education, UTA has been the recipient of multiple national and international awards and conference invitations.
- April 2013, Dr. Peggy Semingson, awarded the United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA), Best Practices Award for Excellence in Distance Learning Teaching.
- April 2013, Dr. Samuel H. "Pete" Smith, awarded the USDLA, Outstanding Leadership by an Individual in the Field of Distance Learning.
- April 2015, Dr. Szu-Yen (Neal) Liang, awarded the USDLA, Best Practices Award for Excellence in Distance Learning Teaching.
- April 2020, Dr. Karabi Bezboruah, awarded the USDLA, Excellence in Teaching/Training Award.

CDE Services

To enhance effective, efficient delivery of quality and engaging online education, CDE provides services to faculty, staff, and students in five key areas: Instructional Design, Faculty

Training & Development, Technical Media Production, Operations & Support, and Online Programming & Policy. CDE's key staff (Appendix C) lead the following service teams.
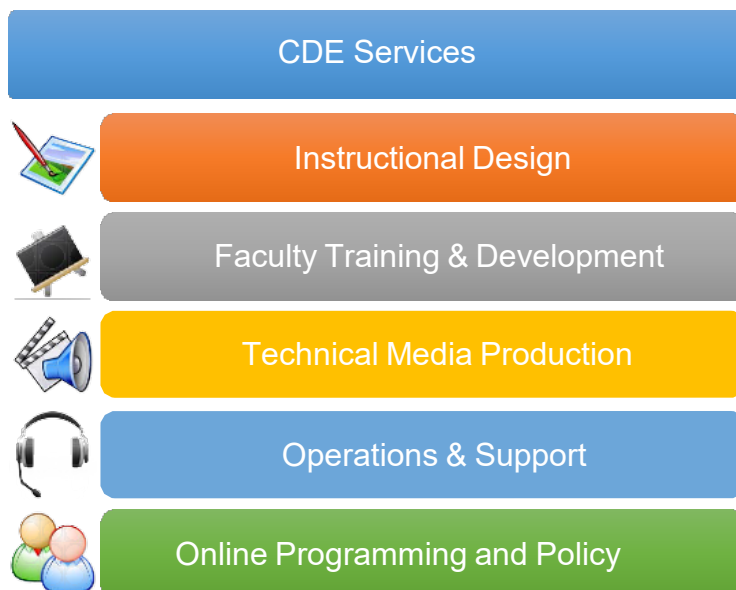
Instructional Design

CDE assists UTA faculty and staff with developing and delivering quality online courses that enhance access and ensure success. The Instructional Design team encourages faculty to challenge their assumptions about teaching and learning practices to enhance the learning experience with dynamic teaching tools and approaches. Instructional designers collaborate with faculty throughout the course design process with varying scopes of work; scaled to the needs and experience of instructors, students, and t h e breadth and depth of course content.

The instructional design process aids faculty in:
- Identifying clear and measurable learning objectives.
- Organizing and creating dynamic online instructional content.
- Developing a variety of aligned LMS activities and assessments.
- Selecting and implementing appropriate accessible technologies that meet the needs of all diverse learners.

All aspects of the CDE course design process are evaluated through the lens of theory, research, and practical experience. UTA is a member of Quality Matters (QM), a nationally recognized standards-based program that offers faculty quality assurance in online course design with a focus on continuous improvement.

QM develops and disseminates rubrics for the effective design of online and blended courses, based on research findings and best practices advocated by leading distance learning organizations. All online courses designed through CDE are evaluated using the QM Rubric (Appendix C). Throughout the instructional design process, CDE designers assess and make recommendations that will allow the course to meet QM standards.

Faculty Training & Development

CDE's faculty and staff Training Manager provides quality instruction to all UTA employees; regardless of modality (online or in classroom settings). Employees are trained in the

understanding and use of online technology tools available to help create a better learning environment for their students. Faculty and staff are guided through integrated LMS features and other integrated tools including:

- Discussions
- Assignments and Assessments
- Plagiarism Review
- Grade Center
- Retention Center
- Web Conferencing
- Grade Extract
- Canvas Studio (video recording tool)
- Respondus and Lockdown Browser/Monitor (exam proctoring tool)
- Ally (document accessibility)

This training portfolio is modified and expanded as new tools are incorporated into the online learning environment and made available to UTA faculty and staff. Training and development formats include:

- Open enrollment face-to-face workshops
- Live webinars
- Open labs for advanced questions
- One-on-one meetings
- Custom workshops for department specific topics

Technical Media Production

Online courses at UTA are developed with the intention of facilitating a student learning experience that surpasses mundane text on a screen. CDE's Technical Media Production professional works with instructional designers and faculty to develop and incorporate multimedia assets into online courses. CDE can record and edit audio and video to include course introductions, interviews, lectures, and instructional videos. CDE can also generate graphic assets, such as, diagrams, flowcharts, slides, and short animations to help illustrate concepts.

A 3-hour online course might include a 5-minute recorded HD video introduction, where the instructor welcomes the students, gives a brief course overview, lists learning goals, and highlights any special course requirements. Additionally, each course module may have its own 3 to 5-minute filmed segment introducing the topics contained within that section. It may also include a short, filmed presentation or interview with a guest speaker, and instructional videos incorporating graphics generated to illustrate concepts or procedures. In an online course, incorporating the face and voice of the course instructor can help overcome the detachment some might feel by not sharing a physical classroom environment on a regular basis. The goal of the Technical Media Production team is to assist the instructor in bringing content and learning to life.
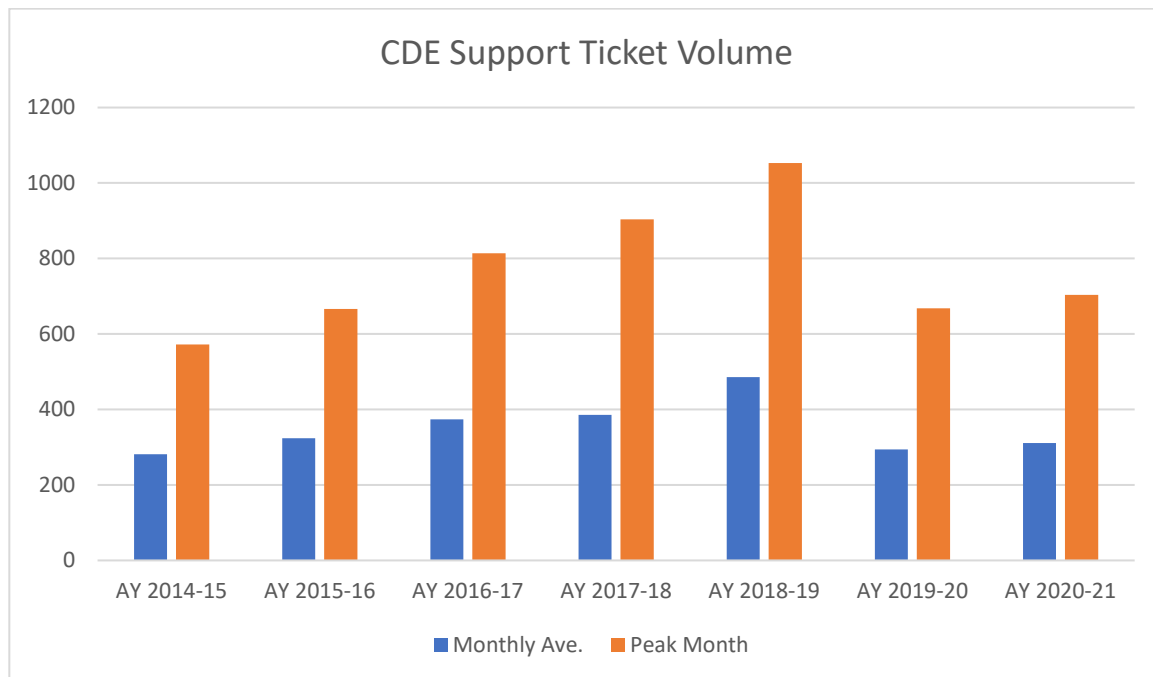
Operations & Support

Instructional technology specialists troubleshoot technical issues encountered by faculty and students and provide answers to both technical and procedural questions. Beyond faculty and student support, the Operations & Support team works closely with LMS Vendor Operations to address LMS enhancements and software errors. The team manages UTA's LMS, configures its settings, and installs and tests other integrated software tools and data integrations. Much of this

effort is facilitated discretely so that faculty and students encounter minimal interruptions to teaching and learning.

Additionally, the Operations & Support team manages integrations with large textbook publishers allowing access to online publisher materials through the LMS course shells. Grades earned while engaging with the online content are transmitted back to the LMS course grade center, facilitating ease of management for the instructor. CDE currently manages integrations with Cengage, McGraw-Hill, Pearson, Wiley Plus and MacMillan.

During the 2020-2021* academic year, 70,552 unique** users accessed the Canvas LMS. Throughout the year the CDE Support team addressed 3,736 support tickets with a peak monthly volume in August 2021 of 704 tickets.

CDE Support Ticket Volume

Academic Year	Monthly Ave.	Peak Month
AY 2014-15	~285	~570
AY 2015-16	~325	~665
AY 2016-17	~375	~815
AY 2017-18	~385	~905
AY 2018-19	~485	~1055
AY 2019-20	~295	~670
AY 2020-21	~310	~705

As an extension of CDE Operations & Support, LMS Vendor Support Services provides technical support to faculty and students 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, via phone, live chat, and web tickets. This support includes basic LMS assistance and internet connectivity troubleshooting. In the 2020-2021 academic year, an additional 7,142 tickets were handled through LMS Vendor Support Services.

*Ticket volume for 2020-21 is likely lower due to instructors having the ability to merge their own courses but was partially offset by the pandemic-induced shift to online.

**A unique user is defined as any individual with an UTA email account and at least one course enrollment during the time period.

Online Programming and Policy

CDE functions as an essential support unit assisting academic and other functional units to aid in the accomplishment of UTA's strategic goals. The unique nature of online programs at UTA mandates an elevated level of coordination and collaboration among UTA departments, external vendors, and other stakeholders. As an integral partner in the success of online education, the Manager of Digital Programs and Policy coordinates several special projects focused on compliance, quality, services, resources, and programming.

UTA's Accelerated Online programs are unique and require special project management and close cross-functional coordination to ensure the programs' distinctive needs are met to ensure student success. Execution of these programs requires both collaboration between UTA departments (i.e., Admissions, Records and Registration, Financial Aid, Student Accounts, and Academic Advising) and coordination with Academic Partnerships for marketing, recruiting, and program development purposes.

Students residing in all 50 US states and 6 US territories have completed online courses offered by UTA. To ensure UTA is legally authorized to enroll students in programs and operate outside of the state of Texas, CDE has been designated as UTA's central resource for State Authorization federal regulatory updates and manager of UTA's national reciprocity agreement membership. State Authorization is the process by which UTA seeks permission to offer its programs to students located outside of Texas, as required by the U.S. Department of Education.

Participation in The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement, NC-SARA, provides UTA automatic state-level authorization for each state that belongs to NC- SARA. This means that UT Arlington is currently authorized at the state level in 49 states, Washington D.C., Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

NC-SARA authorizes an institution for state-level authority but is not binding on professional boards such as nursing and education. Institutions must also satisfy regulatory disclosure requirements for programs leading to licensure as well as the requirements of professional licensing boards to provide their programs to students living in these states. Ongoing compliance coordination with the Office of the Provost and individual colleges and programs offering their online programs outside of Texas is an ongoing CDE function that works to ensure these programs are in compliance.

Summary

Online education at UTA has quickly become a priority for the University and the community. Market demand has fueled CDE to land where it is today with a modern technical infrastructure (LMS and related tools); dedicated, experienced core staff for faculty training, instructional design, operations and support, and program coordination; and many Colleges' endeavoring to grow in entirely online programs.

With the clear and fresh vision of the institutional Strategic Plan, how UTA's online programming evolves in the future will be determined by:

> ➤ **Investment (including personnel)**
> ➤ **Identified key target market areas (subjects, programs)**
> ➤ **Partnerships**
> ➤ **Data, systems, and processes to "enhance student access and ensure student success"**

In addition to the day-to-day activities supporting the delivery of online education, the CDE stands ready to work with UTA leaders and Colleges to develop strategic goals that align with the Guiding Aspirations, Operational Priorities, and Maverick Imperatives. As stated in the Strategic Plan, UTA "… will set new standards for a transformative educational experience not bound by time, space, or location."

Appendix A

Center for Distance Education Services

The **Center for Distance Education (CDE)** provides services to faculty, staff, and students in five key areas:

Instructional Design
- Designers work with faculty and staff to develop and deliver online courses.
- Designers collaborate with faculty throughout the course design process, with varying scopes of work scaled to the needs and experience of instructors and students and breadth and depth of course content.
- UTA is a member of Quality Matters (QM), a nationally recognized, standards-based program that offers faculty quality assurance in online course design with a focus on continuous improvement. All online courses designed through CDE are evaluated using the QM Rubric.
- Throughout the instructional design process, CDE designers assess and make recommendations that will allow the course to meet QM standards.

Faculty Training & Development
- CDE provides quality instructional technology training to faculty and staff.
- Trainers assist faculty and staff in the understanding and use of digital technology tools available and guide participants through integrated LMS features and other integrated tools.
- Training is offered in a variety of formats, including traditional workshops, webinars, and one-on-one.

Technical Media Production
- Works with designers and faculty to develop and incorporate multimedia assets into online courses.
- Has the ability to record and edit audio and video and can generate graphic assets, such as diagrams, flowcharts, slides, and short animations.

Operations & Support
- Instructional technology specialists troubleshoot technical issues encountered by users and answer technical and procedural questions.
- Work closely with vendors to address LMS enhancements and software errors.
- The team manages the LMS, configures its settings, schedules software upgrades, and installs and tests other integrated software tools and data integrations.

Program Development & Coordination
- Assists academic and operational units through coordination and collaboration efforts.
- Manages several special projects and programs.
- Manages the University's membership in and compliance with the SARA network for authorization to operate in states other than Texas.

Appendix B

Online Student Enrollment

Student taking at least one online course:

2014-15: 26,634

2015-16: 30,004

2016-17: 34,926

2017-18: 37,711

2018-19: 39,418

2019-20: 40,048

2020-21: 57,845

Fully online students:

2014-15: 20,070

2015-16: 22,983

2016-17: 27,120

2017-18: 28,657

2018-19: 29,690

2019-20: 29,303

2020-21: 34,276

Overall UTA Enrollment:

2014-15: 51,443

2015-16: 54,821

2016-17: 58,664

2017-18: 59,835

2018-19: 60,549

2019-20: 60,930

2020-21: 60,745

*12/12/2021. Data files and/or statistics generated in this report includes all in-state, out-of-state, and international student registrations in sessions that began any time within the specified time period. Counts may be higher than those reported to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, due to CB rules about reporting enrollments of out-of-state students taking only online classes, and rules about the timing of reporting classes that begin after census day of a particular semester. In addition, only approved data sets from the Office of Business Affairs may be used for budgetary needs.

Appendix C

Quality Matters Rubric

HE — Specific Review Standards from the QM Higher Education Rubric, Sixth Edition

General Standards	Specific Review Standards	Points
Course Overview and Introduction	1.1 Instructions make clear how to get started and where to find various course components.	3
	1.2 Learners are introduced to the purpose and structure of the course.	3
	1.3 Communication expectations for online discussions, email, and other forms of interaction are clearly stated.	2
	1.4 Course and institutional policies with which the learner is expected to comply are clearly stated within the course, or a link to current policies is provided.	2
	1.5 Minimum technology requirements for the course are clearly stated, and information on how to obtain the technologies is provided.	2
	1.6 Computer skills and digital information literacy skills expected of the learner are clearly stated.	1
	1.7 Expectations for prerequisite knowledge in the discipline and/or any required competencies are clearly stated.	1
	1.8 The self-introduction by the instructor is professional and is available online.	1
	1.9 Learners are asked to introduce themselves to the class.	1
Learning Objectives (Competencies)	2.1 The course learning objectives, or course/program competencies, describe outcomes that are measurable.	3
	2.2 The module/unit-level learning objectives or competencies describe outcomes that are measurable and consistent with the course-level objectives or competencies.	3
	2.3 Learning objectives or competencies are stated clearly, are written from the learner's perspective, and are prominently located in the course.	3
	2.4 The relationship between learning objectives or competencies and learning activities is clearly stated.	3
	2.5 The learning objectives or competencies are suited to the level of the course.	3
Assessment and Measurement	3.1 The assessments measure the achievement of the stated learning objectives or competencies.	3
	3.2 The course grading policy is stated clearly at the beginning of the course.	3
	3.3 Specific and descriptive criteria are provided for the evaluation of learners' work, and their connection to the course grading policy is clearly explained.	3
	3.4 The assessments used are sequenced, varied, and suited to the level of the course.	2
	3.5 The course provides learners with multiple opportunities to track their learning progress with timely feedback.	2
Instructional Materials	4.1 The instructional materials contribute to the achievement of the stated learning objectives or competencies.	3
	4.2 The relationship between the use of instructional materials in the course and completing learning activities is clearly explained.	3
	4.3 The course models the academic integrity expected of learners by providing both source references and permissions for use of instructional materials.	2
	4.4 The instructional materials represent up-to-date theory and practice in the discipline.	2
	4.5 A variety of instructional materials is used in the course.	2
Learning Activities and Learner Interaction	5.1 The learning activities promote the achievement of the stated learning objectives or competencies.	3
	5.2 Learning activities provide opportunities for interaction that support active learning.	3
	5.3 The instructor's plan for interacting with learners during the course is clearly stated.	3
	5.4 The requirements for learner interaction are clearly stated.	2
Course Technology	6.1 The tools used in the course support the learning objectives or competencies.	3
	6.2 Course tools promote learner engagement and active learning.	3
	6.3 A variety of technology is used in the course.	1
	6.4 The course provides learners with information on protecting their data and privacy.	1
Learner Support	7.1 The course instructions articulate or link to a clear description of the technical support offered and how to obtain it.	3
	7.2 Course instructions articulate or link to the institution's accessibility policies and services.	3
	7.3 Course instructions articulate or link to the institution's academic support services and resources that can help learners succeed in the course.	3
	7.4 Course instructions articulate or link to the institution's student services and resources that can help learners succeed.	1
Accessibility* and Usability	8.1 Course navigation facilitates ease of use.	3
	8.2 The course design facilitates readability.	3
	8.3 The course provides accessible text and images in files, documents, LMS pages, and web pages to meet the needs of diverse learners.	3
	8.4 The course provides alternative means of access to multimedia content in formats that meet the needs of diverse learners.	2
	8.5 Course multimedia facilitate ease of use.	2
	8.6 Vendor accessibility statements are provided for all technologies required in the course.	2

* Meeting QM Specific Review Standards regarding accessibility does not guarantee or imply that the specific accessibility regulations of any country are met. Consult with an accessibility specialist to ensure that accessibility regulations are met.

QUALITY MATTERS
QM