

Online Education Plan For McNeese State University

Prepared by:

Tom Clay & Associates, Inc.
16 Cedar Lane
Cohasset, MA 02025
781-923-1750
tom.clay@tomclayassoc.com

Prepared for:

Dr. Jeanne Daboval
Provost & Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs
McNeese State University
Lake Charles, LA 70609-3220
337-475-5508
jdaboval@mcneese.edu

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

About this Document

This document contains a plan for McNeese State University (hereafter referred to as McNeese State or, simply, McNeese) to expand its online program offerings. The plan is based on information provided by McNeese and inputs from its administrators, deans and faculty members.

Background

McNeese launched its first web-based course in 1999 and now offers more than 100 online courses, almost all at the undergraduate level. Its online degrees are limited to five programs offered through two consortia. The selection of courses to be offered online has been driven by individual faculty members based on their interest. Those faculty members have received training and support from McNeese's Office of Electronic Learning.

Expanding McNeese's online program offerings should help McNeese to address a number of challenges that it currently faces, including (1) remaining competitive in higher education's rapidly changing market, (2) maintaining enrollment levels in the face of demographic changes, (3) complying with regulatory demands, and (4) filling the educational needs of a growing population of adult students.

Potential for Online Education at McNeese

McNeese's strengths—e.g., strong leadership and faculty, solid and growing reputation, respected academic programs, and robust infrastructure and systems—put it in a solid position to succeed in expanding its online programs. Its main constraint—i.e., a lack of the financial resources required to undertake major expansion—is addressed in this plan.

A Different Approach to Online Education

McNeese should expect to adopt a new model for online education that could include any or all of the following:

- **A Market- and University-Driven Approach rather than the Current Faculty-Driven Approach:** Decisions will be made based on market demands and the university's best interests, rather than on faculty members' individual interests.
- **A Partnership with an Organization that Helps Universities Put Programs Online:** This partnership will enable McNeese to develop

and launch high-quality online programs while generating revenues that will fund enhancements to its internal online education capabilities. Partner organizations offer startup funding and services in exchange for a share of program revenues for a finite period—usually between five and 10 years—and, in so doing, assume the majority of associated financial risk. Services may include market research, instructional design support, faculty training, program marketing, student recruitment, and student retention services. Meanwhile, control of all major decision making and the academic aspects of the online programs remain with McNeese.

- **Focus on a New Target Audience:** These new programs will target a national audience of working adults, most of whom will be between 25 and 55 years old, who (1) want to improve their professional prospects and (2) have personal and professional responsibilities that preclude full-time study.
- **Programs with a New Flavor:** Programs offered primarily at the graduate level will (1) require fully online study (i.e., include no residential component), (2) be open only to online students, (3) consist of condensed seven- or eight-week courses offered in six terms per year, and (4) offer applicants admission decisions in 2-3 weeks. While the creation of these programs will receive priority, existing online courses will continue to be supported.
- **A New Staffing Model for Online Programs:** At the program level the departments will appoint Faculty Program Directors to serve as academic and administrative “point persons,” driving the program/course development process and serving as their departments’ liaisons to other relevant parties. At the course level, courses will be managed by a lead instructor who, in addition to teaching one or two sections, will supervise adjunct instructors, often called “facilitators,” who will teach sections of no more than 25 students.
- **A Reorganized Nontraditional Education Function:** A broad organizational change will bring together all forms of alternative and nontraditional education at McNeese into one college or school. The reorganized function would incubate, support and, where appropriate, manage all forms of nontraditional education on behalf of the provost’s office.
- **Simplified, Competitive Pricing:** For the convenience of prospective students, the tuition and fees structure for McNeese’s online programs will be as simple and straightforward as possible. Tuition

levels, meanwhile, will likely be set higher than McNeese's current tuition to (1) position the programs more advantageously in the online education market and (2) ensure sufficient revenues to support McNeese's partnership.

Guiding Principles

This plan asserts the following principles, which are based on input from deans, faculty members and administrators, and are intended to guide McNeese's online education-related decisions:

Principles for McNeese as a Whole

1. We will build and manage our online degree programs in such a way that they will enhance McNeese's institutional health and well being, and advance its reputation for excellence. In so doing, we will ensure that their success will support McNeese's onsite programs and other activities, rather than come at their expense.
2. We will share the rewards of the programs' success. This will include (1) a revenue sharing model that will direct discretionary funds to participating departments and (2) adjustments to McNeese's reward system so that participation and excellence in McNeese's online education programs are valued in annual performance reviews and merit level decisions.
3. We will continue to adjust our administrative and technology-related policies, processes, systems and infrastructure so that they will optimally serve the needs of McNeese students who may never set foot on campus.

Principles for McNeese's Online Education Unit

Overall Intention

We will work tirelessly to make sure every online degree student receives a great education, completes their degree, and is so happy with their experience here that they spread the word about McNeese.

Principles for Achieving that Intention

1. Our online degree programs and courses will be of the highest quality.
2. We will provide our online degree students with world-class support and service.

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3. We will provide our faculty members with the support they need to create great online courses and to be great online teachers, and create a faculty experience that brings them back again and again to participate in McNeese’s online education programs.
 4. Our strategic decisions will be market-driven.
 5. In running McNeese’s online education function, we will apply sound management principles.
 6. We will honor and continue to build McNeese’s reputation and brand.
-

Accreditation It is unclear whether McNeese will be required to report its partnership to SACS. Inquiries have already been made to seek clarification. A Substantive Change Report will be submitted, if required, but no challenge is expected.

Analysis of Risks This plan analyzes the risks—internal and external—that McNeese faces in adopting this plan, and suggests how they can be mitigated. While many risks are noted, none are deemed so significant that they raise serious doubts about the success of this plan, as long as McNeese manages them effectively.

High-Level Implementation Plan This plan also includes a high-level roadmap—i.e., major steps and related discussion—leading to the launch of the online programs. Those steps are the following:

1. Evaluate this Plan; Adjust if Needed
2. Conduct Initial Detailed Planning
3. Further Test the Plan and Generate Commitment
4. Work Out Details of the “Extended Education” Organization and Appoint its Leader
5. Select a Partner
6. Conduct Further Detailed Planning with Partner
7. Adjust Internal Policies, Processes and Infrastructure to Support Online Programs
8. Select Programs to Be Co-developed

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9. Obtain External Approvals, as Needed
 10. Appoint Academic Program Directors
 11. Fill Any Other Positions of Immediate Need
 12. Launch Program Development and Other Activities with Partner
-

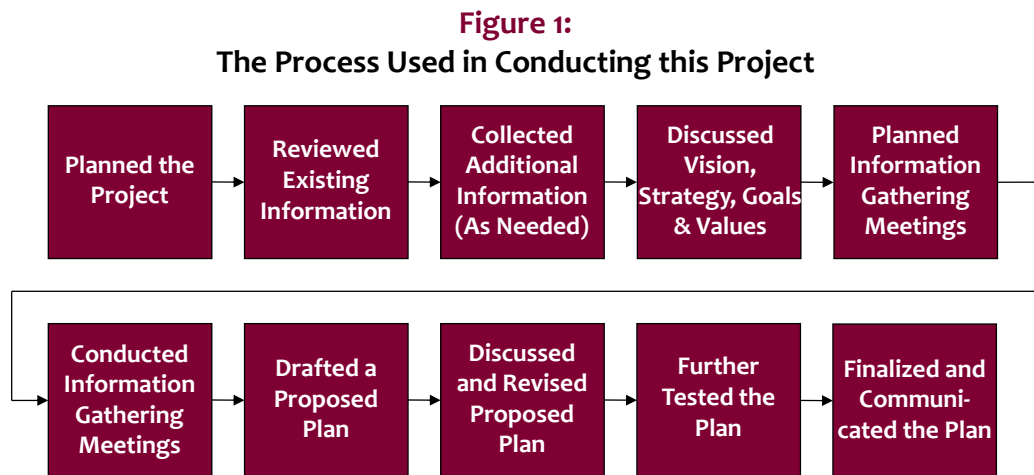
ABOUT THIS PROJECT

Purpose

As of late 2011 McNeese State had made progress in establishing its online presence, but the university’s senior administrators wanted to see online education offerings—particularly fully online programs—developed strategically and at a faster pace. Support existed on campus for online education and an e-learning task force had identified challenges and suggested changes—including the development of an online education strategy—but no such plan was yet in place. Dr. Jeanne Daboval, McNeese State’s provost and vice president for academic and student affairs, therefore asked Tom Clay & Associates, Inc. to work with her office to create such a plan. This report conveys the results.

Methodology

Tom Clay & Associates, Inc. began the project by examining (1) McNeese State’s vision, strategy, goals and values, and (2) the market forces exerting themselves on the university, and then using the results to inform the rest of the inquiry. We then adopted the process shown in **Figure 1**.



The steps shown in **Figure 1** are described as follows:

- **Planned the Project:** Tom Clay & Associates, Inc. and Dr. Daboval finalized the project plan, including the method/approach, the questions to be answered, and the project schedule.
- **Reviewed Existing Information:** Tom Clay & Associates, Inc., in order to understand McNeese State’s current situation, future plans and strategic considerations, then reviewed documentation provided by Dr. Daboval’s office.

About this Project

- **Discussed Vision, Strategy, Goals and Values:** Dr. Daboval explained McNeese’s vision, strategy, goals and values in order to inform subsequent steps.
- **Planned Information Gathering Meetings:** Tom Clay and Dr. Daboval worked together to identify the individuals who would meet with Tom Clay in a series of information gathering meetings.
- **Conducted Information Gathering Meetings:** Tom Clay interviewed 19 individuals. (See the **Appendix** on p. 84 for a list of meeting participants.)
- **Drafted a Proposed Plan:** Tom Clay then analyzed the meeting results and, informed by that analysis, drafted a plan.
- **Discussed and Revised Proposed Plan:** Tom Clay then shared the draft plan with Dr. Daboval for her review and feedback. Dr. Daboval also had the opportunity to share the complete draft or portions of it with selected colleagues. Tom Clay then made adjustments based on discussions of the resulting feedback.
- **Further Tested the Plan:** In order to maximize support for the plan, Dr. Daboval shared it with additional individuals whom she identified, in order to obtain their feedback.
- **Finalized and Communicated the Plan:** Once any needed adjustments had been made, Dr. Daboval received the final plan for wider distribution.

Dr. Daboval served as McNeese State’s point person for the project. The work involved one three-day campus visit by Tom Clay, during which he met Dr. Daboval and other key players from McNeese, developed a feel for the institution, and conducted 10 information gathering meetings face to face. The rest of the work—including information gathering meetings conducted by telephone—was done in Tom Clay & Associates, Inc.’s offices.

BACKGROUND

About McNeese State University

McNeese State University, which is part of the University of Louisiana System, has grown in both name and reputation since being founded in 1939. Originally named Lake Charles Junior College, McNeese State is now classified as a master's university (Carnegie classification) and ranked as a Tier 2 regional university by *U.S. News & World Report*. Although it is primarily regional, traditionally serving southwestern Louisiana, its geographical footprint is expanding.

McNeese State welcomed a new president—Philip C. Williams, J.D., Ph.D.—in July of 2010. Dr. Williams, who has been consistently involved in discussions about this plan, is conducting a larger strategic planning process, which has revealed widespread sentiment from all constituencies indicating that online education is considered both desirable and important for McNeese's future.

The State of Online Education at McNeese

McNeese launched its first web-based course in 1999, and since then has offered well over 100 online courses in a wide range of disciplines. These have been mainly individual courses (vs. degrees) offered at the undergraduate level. McNeese also offers five online degrees, which it offers through two consortia: (1) the Center for Adult Learning in Louisiana (CALL) and (2) the Intercollegiate Consortium for a Master of Science in Nursing (ICMSN) with Southeastern Louisiana University and the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. The CALL programs, which consist of eight-week online courses, are undergraduate degrees aimed, as the CALL name implies, primarily at adult learners.

Online education at McNeese is primarily driven by individual faculty members with guidance and support from McNeese's Office of Electronic Learning, which in turn is guided by the Alternative and Electronic Learning Advisory Group (AELAG), a committee composed of faculty and administrators. The Office of Electronic Learning, among other services, arranges for faculty training in how to build and deliver online courses. Upon completing that training, faculty members may build, manage and deliver their own courses. Based on the knowledge and skills it provides, faculty members play both the instructional designer and subject matter expert (SME) roles in designing and developing online courses.

**Impetus for
Expanding
McNeese's
Online
Education
Presence**

Despite the advances McNeese has made since 1939, its current assets and its substantial future potential, the university faces significant current and future challenges. Those challenges are summarized below.

- **Remaining Competitive:** Both national and regional players are establishing strong online education presences and, in so doing, are encroaching on McNeese's traditional markets. Nationally, the online education movement has gained tremendous momentum over the past decade, with for-profit institutions such as the University of Phoenix and not-for-profits such as Western Governors University (among many, many others) offering McNeese's traditional student base convenient alternative paths to courses and degrees. Regionally, online programs from McNeese's traditional competitors also constitute a growing threat. For example, Northwestern State University now offers more online programs than any other university in Louisiana. Meanwhile, Lamar University is aggressively offering online programs through its partnership with Dallas-based Academic Partnerships (formerly Higher Education Holdings, or HEH), and the University of Louisiana at Lafayette has reportedly also signed an agreement with that firm.
- **Maintaining Enrollment Levels:** Trends in the following areas could make it increasingly difficult for McNeese (and similar schools) to maintain its enrollment levels:
 - Louisiana's high school graduation rate is expected to decline during the next five years, so there will be fewer prospective students in McNeese's traditional markets.
 - Some of the students who would traditionally have attended McNeese will be funneled to Louisiana's community college system because (1) the state is growing that system at the expense of four-year state institutions like McNeese and (2) McNeese will not be permitted by the Regents to admit students in need of remedial education, in effect forcing McNeese to be more selective.
- **Complying with Legislative Requirements:** The LA Grad Act, passed in 2010, includes a provision that all universities under its purview are expected to expand the number of online courses and programs they offer as a means of increasing Louisiana citizens' access to higher education opportunities.
- **Filling the Educational Needs of a Growing Adult Student Population:** The majority of the growth in U.S. higher education in the coming decades is expected to come from adults. These adult populations will want high-quality degree programs (mainly graduate programs, but

Background

also opportunities to complete undergraduate programs that they either did not pursue upon graduation from high school or that they began but did not finish) delivered through flexible means. Demand for higher education from military audiences, like those at nearby Fort Polk, is also expected to remain strong.

- **Meeting Budgetary Needs:** About two-thirds (65%) of McNeese's budget is funded by tuition and fees, and much of the rest comes from state support. But public institutions in the state of Louisiana may not raise their tuition levels without the approval of the state legislature which, in today's climate, is slow to grant such approvals. And the state is cutting back its funding for public institutions. Yet expenses continue to increase. The result of all three factors is that money is very tight at McNeese, the faculty have not had a raise in three years, and there is no relief in sight, as long as the status quo persists.

An answer to all of these challenges is for McNeese to substantially expand its online programs and its corresponding online enrollments. By doing so, McNeese can ensure its prosperity for many years to come. And it can do so in a way that should:

- Raise McNeese's public profile, making it easier to recruit traditional students
 - Fund the university budget generally, thus protecting and potentially increasing onsite academic programs and jobs, and supporting faculty salaries and raises
 - Provide a mechanism for sharing discretionary funds with the academic community
-

POTENTIAL FOR ONLINE EDUCATION AT McNEESE

Overall Assessment

We have concluded, based on the information available to us, that McNeese is in a strong position to expand its online presence with fully online degree programs. This is not to say that its path will always be easy. To the contrary, McNeese *will* face barriers. However, a strong plan, effective implementation, and determination to succeed will be the keys to McNeese's overcoming those barriers and achieving success.

Rationale

Assets

The following advantages that will help McNeese State to successfully grow its online programs:

- Strong leadership
- A commitment to excellence on the part of the administration and faculty
- A strong reputation regionally and a growing reputation beyond
- A distinguished and interested faculty, many of whom are already experienced with designing, developing and delivering online courses
- Respected academic programs, including a number in distinctive fields
- Administrative functions that, although leanly staffed, appear well equipped to support an expanded online presence
- Information technology infrastructure and systems that also appear to be robust and capable of supporting expansion (including McNeese's use of Banner, which provides considerable flexibility in administering online degree programs)

Constraints

The greatest constraint to such expansion at this time is McNeese's lack of financial resources. (This is reflected, for example, in the small online education budget and organization at McNeese and the limited training and support provided to its online students, as well as the limited ongoing training, development and support for faculty members teaching online.) The activities outlined in this plan will require a significant financial investment. In our view, because of the developments in the competitive

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Potential for Online Education at McNeese

marketplace referred to above, McNeese cannot afford to wait until those financial resources become available. This plan does, however, suggest a strategy for accessing that needed funding.

ONLINE EDUCATION MODEL

Overview

This section will start by declaring what this online education plan is **NOT**. By following this plan ...

- McNeese will **NOT** become a fully online institution.
- McNeese will **NOT** replace traditional onsite programs with online programs.
- McNeese will **NOT** replace faculty members with adjuncts.

Rather, as the section titled **Impetus for Expanding McNeese's Online Education Presence** indicates (see p. 10), in following this plan ...

- McNeese **WILL** strengthen and probably even expand its traditional onsite programs.
- McNeese **WILL** supplement its traditional programs by also offering them in an online format.
- McNeese **WILL** generate the financial resources needed to hire additional faculty members who will teach in both online *and* traditional onsite programs.

There are a number of ways this plan could unfold, depending on whom McNeese selects as its partner and how its agreement is structured, but in implementing this plan McNeese must be prepared, generally, to examine how things are currently done there and, based on what is learned, to embrace new and different methods. Specifically, McNeese must be prepared to:

- Adopt a new philosophy and approach concerning how online programs are built, taught and supported, including adopting standards for design and pedagogy, using professional instructional designers, employing adjunct faculty, and providing enhanced levels of student and faculty services
- Elevate the position of online education at McNeese, granting it greater respect than some now give it
- Develop partnerships with one or more external entities, entrust them with functions currently controlled by McNeese, and share tuition revenues with them

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- Target audiences beyond those it traditionally pursues, and implement a special admission process and a nontraditional academic calendar
- Simplify its tuition and fee structure, probably charging higher tuition for online programs
- Undergo a significant reorganization of units that offer nontraditional education
- Make adjustments to administrative and technology-related policies, processes, systems and infrastructure
- Employ more research- and market-driven decision making regarding online offerings

This rest of this chapter consists of the following sections:

- Philosophy/ Approach
- Partnering
- Target Audiences
- Online Offerings
- Staffing and Organization of Online Programs
- Tuition and Fee Structure
- Assessment and Evaluation

Philosophy/ Approach

The Current Faculty-Driven Model

As the section titled **The State of Online Education at McNeese** above (see p. 8) indicates, online education at McNeese is primarily driven by individual faculty members. Individual faculty members have a high degree of freedom in (1) deciding which courses will be offered online (since they develop whatever courses interest them) and (2) determining the design, look-and-feel and quality of their courses. This faculty-driven approach carries both advantages and disadvantages.

The main advantage is that it encourages experimentation and a sense of ownership on the part of the faculty members. However, it also has the following *disadvantages*:

- It implies a lack of a comprehensive, systematic online education strategy at McNeese.
- It encourages the development of online courses rather than *programs*.

Online Education Model

- It incurs additional costs while generating only marginal increases in revenues.
- It provides no financial incentives for McNeese’s colleges and departments to be active participants in online education.
- It funnels resources away from on-campus teaching.

Moreover, the experimentation and sense of ownership referred to as advantages above can also be double-edged swords, insofar as the former can lead to a lack of consistency that can impede McNeese’s branding efforts and confuse students, and the latter may hinder efforts to establish standards.

A More Effective Market- and University-Driven Model

Rather than being faculty-driven, the model we propose will be market- and university-driven insofar as key factors in decision making will be (1) what the market demands and (2) what is in the university’s best interests. Several key implications of this philosophical change are the following:

- Instead of individual faculty members building and delivering courses with support from the Office of Electronic Learning, McNeese’s online education function (whether called the Office of Electronic Learning or by some other name) will partner primarily with the academic departments, and faculty members will participate as representatives of those departments.
- Decisions to offer online programs will be based on market data that indicate sufficient demand.
- McNeese-wide standards for online courses will be established and enforced. Although “sameness” is not the goal, standards will be set and consistency expected to the extent that they further students’ learning outcomes and support McNeese’s branding efforts.

Although this philosophy implies centralized oversight, it nevertheless respects faculty members’ right to academic freedom, since as it grants them the ability to dictate the substance and content of the online courses they develop.

Partnering

The best—and perhaps only truly viable—way for an institution with financial constraints like those discussed on p. 11 to move expeditiously in

Online Education Model

developing a significant online presence is to partner with an organization that helps colleges and universities to put their programs online. In exchange for a share of the revenues from those programs, such organizations provide initial funding and offer a range of critical services, and in so doing assume the vast majority of any financial risk that those programs may imply.

Division of Responsibilities

While the partner will contribute in a number of ways to the relationship (see **Table 1**), two particularly important contributions will be (1) the services of instructional designers who are trained in adult learning and online pedagogies and will work with the academic departments' subject matter experts (SMEs) to create online content, and (2) expertise in online student recruitment generally and online advertising specifically. A possible division of responsibilities between McNeese and its partner is shown in **Table 1** below.

Table 1:
Possible Division of Responsibilities between Partners

McNeese	Partner
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All major decision making ● Overall management of the enterprise and the relationship with the partner ● Academic oversight ● Academic content ● Admissions decisions ● Instruction ● Assessment and evaluation ● Academic advising ● Library and information resources ● Infrastructure/hosting ● Program administration ● Faculty support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Funding (and therefore financial risk) ● Market research (i.e., to help identify the right programs to be offered online) ● Instructional design expertise, course development, and related project management ● Faculty training ● Program marketing ● Student recruitment/enrollment counseling ● Student retention services ● 24/7 technical support

As the list of McNeese's responsibilities indicates, control over all major decision making will reside with the university, and all academic aspects of the programs will be in the hands of the departments. (McNeese's agreement with its partner should explicitly state that McNeese will (1) maintain direct and sole responsibility for the academic quality of all aspects of all programs and (2) have final approval of all aspects of the online programs.)

The Agreement

The length of contracts with such partners vary between five and 10 years; generally speaking, it is in the university's best interest to have as short an agreement as possible. Although some partners hope to lock their university partners into long-term relationships and make it difficult for them to "cut the apron strings," others explicitly set out to prepare their university partners to operate independently. McNeese should hope to partner with one of the latter. McNeese should also consider, if possible, demonstrating its commitment—and thereby retaining a larger share of the revenues—by contributing some amount of initial funding toward the course development costs.

What Happens When the Partnership Agreement Expires

The partnership will enable McNeese to develop and launch the highest quality programs in the short term, and meanwhile to generate revenues that will help it to enhance its own internal online education capabilities. With those capabilities fully in place, McNeese will be prepared to (1) maintain its initial programs when those responsibilities revert to it at the end of the partnership, and (2) develop courses from the outset for any subsequent programs. At the conclusion of the partnership McNeese may, by choice, continue to outsource services—e.g., market research and marketing/student recruitment—that it chooses not to develop in house because insourcing them would not make sense for financial or other reasons.

For more discussion of partnering, see the chapter titled **Sourcing Strategy** starting on p. 47.

Target Audiences

McNeese's online programs are likely to target adults who (1) are interested in improving their professional prospects, i.e., either seeking advancement in their current careers or changing careers, and (2) have personal and professional responsibilities that preclude full-time study. Most of these are likely to be working adults. Two key characteristics of the programs' target markets are:

- **Age:** The primary target group for these programs will be adult learners who are between 25 and 55 years old and average about 35. This group will be the focus of McNeese's recruitment and course design activities. This does not mean that McNeese will *exclude* individuals who apply from outside of that age group. If they are interested and are a good fit, there is no reason not to admit them.

Online Education Model

- **Geography:** McNeese should plan to attract a national audience. Initially, many of them are likely to come from Louisiana and nearby states, where McNeese is better known, but programs with a wider reputation should draw better from beyond. Since the intention is to build McNeese’s national reputation, the university should draw its online students increasingly from greater distances as the years pass. (McNeese needs to adopt a national perspective in thinking about these programs, and must recognize that its current competitors—e.g., the other members of the University of Louisiana System—may not be their online programs’ primary competitors. Rather, their competitors will differ by program and be national.)

Note: McNeese’s traditional admission standards will also apply to its online programs, so it will not admit students to its online program whom it would not admit on campus.

Two other groups are possible targets for McNeese’s online programs:

- **Members of the U.S. Military:** If an agreement can be worked out with Fort Polk, McNeese may be able to supplement its enrollments with those of Fort Polk’s soldiers and their spouses, whose circumstances, motivation, and maturity will be more similar to those of working adults than to those of traditional college-aged students.
Caveat: It may be that the programs McNeese and its partner agree to offer will be of interest to Fort Polk. On the other hand, if Fort Polk asked McNeese to offer online programs that it would not otherwise have offered, it is not a foregone conclusion that McNeese and its partner would co-develop them. If projected market demand for such programs did not justify the partnership building them, McNeese would have to decide whether to build them without its partner’s participation. In making that decision, it would have to consider the importance of its Fort Polk relationship and the “goodwill” required to maintain it, and the number of Fort Polk students likely to enroll.
- **Graduates of the LVS High School Program:** Graduates of the Louisiana Virtual School’s high school program are probably more likely than other recent high school graduates to enroll in online programs, since they are accustomed to that medium. If they have been successful there, they also likely possess the maturity and motivation required to succeed in an online program. They are unlikely to be an important market for these programs, however, since they qualify only for undergraduate programs and this plan calls for McNeese to focus at the graduate level (see p. 19).

Note: It is important for McNeese to understand and acknowledge the differences between the target market for its online programs and traditional-age on-campus students. The former will be motivated adults, many of whom work full time and have families. They will likely be willing to work hard, but will have to carve time out of busy lives to do so. The typical student may work all day, eat dinner with his/her family, tuck in the children, and then settle in to study for several hours each weekday evening, and also designate blocks of time for weekend study. Because their time is so precious, they will be loath to waste it. This is why it is so important for McNeese’s administrative and educational processes—both during the recruitment process and after they have enrolled—to be efficient and to honor their time. In fact, if they feel that their time is being wasted at any point in the recruitment process, they may well turn their attention to competing schools that they believe *will* honor their time.

Online Offerings

We suggest that the online programs addressed in this plan focus on graduate programs, and that they all be built on a common model and share a pedagogical approach. We envision that McNeese’s online education function, working closely with its partner, will define a university-wide approach to online education, and the processes, procedures, tools and standards (including templates, technology, “look and feel,” etc.) that will be used in creating all McNeese online programs going forward. This approach will be designed specifically to meet the needs of adult learners/fully online students. We also suggest that part of the approach be the formal adoption of a national standard for McNeese’s online programs, such as Quality Matters.¹ The McNeese online education approach will also provide guidance for faculty members to update online courses that they have previously developed.

Pedagogy

The online pedagogy will be determined through discussions between McNeese and its partner, but McNeese should expect it to include a significant number of the following:

- The programs will be delivered entirely online, i.e., there will be no residential requirement. They will be open only to online degree

¹ Quality Matters (QM) is a nationally recognized, faculty-centered, peer review process started by a consortium of colleges and universities and designed to certify the quality of online courses and online components. Colleges and universities across the country use the tools in developing, maintaining and reviewing their online courses and in training their faculty. (See <http://www.qmprogram.org>.) We understand that McNeese is already a member of the QM organization, and that its current faculty training, although not official QM training, is consistent with it.

Online Education Model

students, and on-campus students will not have the option of registering.²

- Every course will be designed to generate consistently high levels of student participation and interaction.
- Supplying expertise in effective design and pedagogy, the instructional designers will work with McNeese’s subject matter experts to translate academic content into lively, engaging and interactive online materials that will stimulate substantial instructor-student, student-instructor and student-student interactions. Specific design elements may include discussion forums, teleconferences, video lectures, quizzes, study guides, journals, individual reading and written assignments, group assignments, audio-visual assignments, research papers, and capstone experiences.
- Courses will be condensed into a seven- or eight-week schedule; this implies an intensive student experience, since neither the content nor the educational outcomes of the online courses will be compromised.
- These courses will be offered in six seven- or eight-week terms, and will therefore (1) run year-round and (2) provide new students with six entry points, i.e., two each in the fall, spring and summer.
- Consistent with industry best practices, courses that exceed a pre-determined number of students (to be agreed to by McNeese and its partner) will be divided into sections. Additional sections will be created as enrollment levels necessitate.
- The use of synchronous elements will be determined in the instructional design process, but those elements may be subject to logistical limitations that will result from students being located in different time zones, including overseas.
- Student learning will be assessed through a variety of means, including (1) assignments aligned with course learning outcomes, e.g., regular contributions to discussion boards, short essays, longer research papers and, where applicable, quantitative assignments, (2) periodic tests, (3) midterm examinations and (4) final examinations. Courses may also include group assignments requiring student collaboration. Multiple-choice tests could be included in some courses, but in such cases would be used primarily to encourage review of the course

² In order to facilitate planning and scheduling, the programs will likely be designed to be taken in lockstep by cohorts of online degree students who will remain together throughout their degree studies. Other strategic considerations—e.g., revenue sharing arrangements and different tuition rates—also militate against including onsite students in these programs.

material and not as significant components of student evaluation. Examinations will require that students demonstrate an in-depth understanding of the material, will often encourage students to include examples from their professional lives, and will typically be completed on a take-home basis.

Admissions

The recruitment/admission process will likely include the following:

- Program information will need to be easy to find, well organized, easy to interpret and easy to compare with competitors'. (This will signal to prospective applicants that McNeese understands their needs and will not waste their time once they have enrolled.)
- Online programs will be applied to via a separate application and a separate application process, which will be fast and convenient for working adults.
- McNeese will offer rolling admissions.
- McNeese will offer 2-3 week turnaround on admission decisions. It will be a strategic imperative that McNeese tell applicants how long those decisions will take, and then deliver on that commitment.
- Because there will be six terms, no admitted student will have to wait long before starting his/her studies.

Method for Verifying Students' Identities

Because McNeese will host its online programs on its own learning management system (LMS), it will decide how to verify its students' identities, but it may be useful to discuss this issue, which is of increasing interest to accrediting agencies, with its partner. The method ultimately arrived at will depend largely on (1) SACS's requirements at that time and (2) McNeese's own standards and capabilities. (Despite the attention this issue is currently receiving and the availability of motion-detectors, retinal scanners, etc., many schools use fairly traditional, low-tech approaches.³

³ For example, one institution included the following paragraph in an application to its regional accreditor for approval of online programs:

"Each student will be issued a secure login ID and password, and will be instructed upon receiving it and reminded during training and orientation activities not to share it with anyone. Once enrolled, students will have extensive virtual interactions with their instructors, who will get to know their personalities, academic capabilities and writing styles. Similarly, they will become well known to their academic advisors and student retention specialists, who will monitor their academic progress and other interactions with the University."

For further discussion of McNeese’s online offerings, see **Curriculum** starting on p. 29.

Staffing and Organization of Online Programs

This section addresses the staffing and organization of online programs specifically. For discussion of wider staffing and organization plans, see **Organization and Operations** starting on p. 54.)

Each online program will be staffed at two levels: (1) the program level and (2) the course level. Each level of this scalable model is described below.

The Program Level

Each program will be managed by an academic program director, who usually holds a faculty position in the relevant department. The academic program director will serve as the department’s academic and administrative “point person” for the program, driving the development process, serving as the department’s primary liaison with the online education function, the partner, subject matter experts, instructors and students, coordinating communication among the various parties during delivery, and trouble-shooting as needed.

Before the program’s launch, s/he will oversee the development process and act as McNeese’s primary liaison with its partner for that particular program. S/he will recruit and manage the faculty members who will serve as subject matter experts and work with the partner’s instructional designers to translate academic content into the online courses that will constitute the program. After the launch, s/he will administer the program, drive the recruitment of its adjunct faculty and, at least at the outset, handle student advisement. (When the number of students exceeds his/her ability to advise them, other arrangements will be made; these could include hiring dedicated academic advisors.)

Because the academic program director is a faculty-level position, its qualifications are equivalent to those for other full-time faculty positions. It is likely that candidates with demonstrated administrative skills will, however, have an advantage in the hiring process.

The Course Level

Once launched, each course will be managed by a lead instructor. This will usually be a McNeese faculty member, who in many cases will have served

Online Education Model

as the SME during course development. A lead instructor will typically teach (or, in the language often used, facilitate) one or more sections depending on his/her schedule and course load. Additional sections will be taught by facilitators who are hired, often on an adjunct basis, for that purpose. Some people find it useful to think of these facilitators as filling the role that teaching assistants fill in many onsite university courses. While there are similarities, these facilitators actually teach their sections under the lead instructor's supervision, rather than assist the lead instructor in teaching them. Accordingly, they are usually much better qualified to teach at the university level than the typical TA.

The academic program directors will recruit facilitators and any external SMEs through the networks of McNeese's faculty members, since hiring instructors who come highly recommended will help ensure quality. They will likely be early retirees, McNeese alumni/ae, regular faculty from other institutions, individuals who specialize in free-lance online teaching at multiple institutions, and doctoral candidates in relevant fields.⁴ (McNeese's existing adjuncts, called visiting lecturers, or VLs, may also be tapped to teach online).

Tuition and Fee Structure

McNeese will need to arrive at a pricing strategy for its online programs, which should consider the following:

- **Tuition and Fee Structure:** The tuition and fee structure should be as simple as possible, enabling prospective students to understand at a glance how much they will pay per credit, per course and for the program as a whole. This implies incorporating any necessary fees into the cost of tuition where practical; where that is not practical, it implies few and simple fees. Since McNeese's current tuition structure is quite complicated, this implies that the tuition and fee structure for its online programs will differ from that of its onsite programs.
- **Competitive Pricing:** Tuition for McNeese's onsite programs is not just reasonable; it is a bargain. While this seems to serve the university well, a higher price point may work better for its online programs for two reasons:

⁴ According to a recent *Economist* article, an analysis of titles listed by members of social networking company LinkedIn indicated that "one of the fastest growing job titles in America is 'adjunct professor'." See "A pixelated portrait of labour: LinkedIn offers a new way to look at employment," *The Economist*, March 10, 2012 (<http://www.economist.com/node/21549948>).

Online Education Model

- It is often said that schools should avoid pricing their online programs at the bottom of their markets since (1) there is a widespread perception among online students that “you get what you pay for,” (2) there are significant numbers of less-than-reputable online programs available, (3) prospective students have difficulty distinguishing the reputable from the disreputable programs, and (4) pricing—rightly or wrongly—is one way they try to distinguish. In other words, if a program is priced too low, it may be assumed not to be reputable. That logic dictates that schools price their online programs near the middle of the market unless they have distinctive brands or other features that can justify higher pricing.
- The second reason relates to programs’ financial viability. If a program is priced too low, it may not produce enough revenue to cover the costs associated with designing, developing, marketing, supporting and administering it. This is a particular concern where the school offering the online program develops it with a partner, since the program has to generate enough revenue to justify the involvement of both parties once it has been shared.
- **Program-Specific Pricing:** There is no need to price all programs at the same level. McNeese could set different prices for different programs depending on factors such as different development and delivery costs and differences in demand.
- **In-State and Out-of-State Tuition:** If possible, McNeese should charge the same tuition to all students, whether in- or out-of-state.

McNeese may not, however, have complete freedom in setting its own pricing, since the state of Louisiana assumes the right to regulate public university tuition. If this were found to apply to the programs proposed in this plan, their tuition would either need to (1) mirror that charged in-state students who attend McNeese’s on-campus programs or (2) be approved by the legislature.

Other factors could override the state’s control, however. First, as implied above, the state does not limit tuition for out-of-state students. (In fact, it has encouraged Louisiana’s public institutions to raise their out-of-state tuition rates.) And second, public institutions can invoke special pricing—referred to as “student contract pricing”—for special or peripheral programs for which the legislature does not set pricing. If applicable, this would provide the flexibility McNeese needs. Arriving at a strategy that is workable for these programs and conforms to all applicable laws and

regulations will require further thought, additional investigation and perhaps a good dose of creativity.

**Assessment
and
Evaluation**

It will also be important for McNeese to incorporate the assessment and evaluation of its online programs into its overall assessment and evaluation strategy. The portion of that strategy that addresses online programs should (1) focus on the assessment of student learning, (2) include both formative and summative evaluation, (3) be applied not just within the programs, but also across them, and (4) be used to promote continuous improvement. Furthermore, it should be congruent with existing elements of the strategy, ensuring that the assessment of learning in McNeese's online programs is comparable to that of its onsite programs, and can therefore be used to validly compare the two delivery modes.

Our understanding is that McNeese's Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Academic Support, with the assistance of the Office of Institutional Research, spearheads assessment and evaluation at McNeese, and is therefore the function most likely to drive this strategy. It will probably be the departments, however, that implement the evaluation of their own online programs under the guidance of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Academic Support.

For a discussion of student assessment, see p. 20.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Purpose of these Principles

The intention here was to articulate a set of principles to guide McNeese in making decisions related to its online education strategy. While they could apply to any decision, they will be especially useful when there are doubts or disagreements about what decision is best.

There may be instances in which these principles are not quite aligned with McNeese’s current practices. Since McNeese’s current practices evolved to fulfill a different purpose and to support a different method of delivering higher education, they may not be ideally suited to the successful delivery of online education. Therefore, where any such contrasts are found, these principles and not the current practices should be followed.

Their Source

Toward the end of the information-gathering meetings conducted for this project, many of the deans, faculty members and administrators we spoke with—having already discussed their opinions of online education, McNeese’s prospects for offering online programs, and aspects of the model that is described in this plan—were asked to complete the following sentence: “I can support the creation of online programs at McNeese as long as ...” Their responses are the basis for these principles.

Principles for McNeese as an Institution

- 1. We will build and manage our online degree programs in such a way that they will enhance McNeese’s institutional health and well being, and advance its reputation for excellence. In so doing, we will ensure that their success will support McNeese’s onsite programs and other activities, rather than come at their expense.**
- 2. We will share the rewards of the programs’ success. This will include (1) a revenue sharing model that will direct discretionary funds to participating departments and (2) adjustments to McNeese’s reward system so that participation and excellence in McNeese’s online education programs are valued in annual performance reviews and merit level decisions.**
- 3. We will continue to adjust our administrative and technology-related policies, processes, systems and infrastructure so that they will optimally serve the needs of McNeese students who may never set foot on campus.**

**Principles for
McNeese’s
Online
Education
Unit**

Overall Intention:

We will work tirelessly to make sure every online degree student receives a great education, completes their degree, and is so happy with their experience here that they spread the word about McNeese.

The six principles listed below declare how McNeese’s online education function will realize that intention. Each of the principles is followed by illustrative examples.

1. Our online degree programs and courses will be of the highest quality.

- If we can’t or won’t do it well, we won’t do it.
- We will never offer an “electronic correspondence course”!
- We will select a quality standard—e.g., Quality Matters—and always adhere to it.
- The quality, academic rigor and outcomes of our online programs will equal or exceed those of our onsite programs.
- We will measure program and course outcomes and use what we learn to continuously improve the education we deliver.

2. We will provide our online degree students with world-class support and service.

- We will deliver *Excellence with a personal touch ...* online.
- We will proactively seek opportunities to help our online degree students succeed.
- We will create an excellent student experience for every student, every day.

3. We will provide our faculty members with the support they need to create great online courses and to be great online teachers, and create a faculty experience that brings them back again and again to participate in McNeese’s online education programs.

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Guiding Principles

- Recognizing that building and teaching great online courses demand different knowledge and skills, we will commit to providing our faculty members the right developmental opportunities.
- We will provide our SMEs with instructional design support and our online teachers with support in non-academic areas, enabling the former to create great online courses and the latter to focus on great teaching.

4. Our strategic decisions will be market-driven.

- We will understand our markets and their needs, and design programs and processes to meet those needs.
- We will evaluate and prioritize online education programs according to their market potential.

5. In running McNeese’s online education function, we will apply sound management principles.

- We will create “wins” for all participants in McNeese online education—students, administrators, the online education function, the colleges, the departments and individual faculty members—and therefore for the university as a whole.
- Those who will be held accountable for the success of McNeese’s online education programs will be given responsibility for them; online education will not be run “by committee” (as is often done unsuccessfully at other institutions).

6. We will honor and continue to build McNeese’s reputation and brand.

- All websites, courses and marketing materials/communications related to McNeese’s online programs—whether distributed in physical form or virtually—will conform to McNeese’s identity system standards (e.g., correct use of colors, logos, etc.).
- All interactions and communications will strictly adhere to the highest ethical and legal standards.

CURRICULUM

General Advice

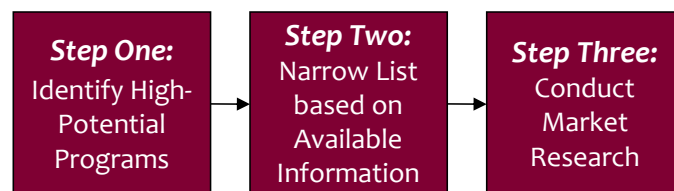
McNeese should focus initially on fully online *graduate* programs, since there tends to be more demand for them by adult learners and they tend to be less complicated to build, market and deliver than undergraduate programs. (For example, they are shorter and therefore quicker to get to market, and their courses generally come from a single department, meaning that there is little need to recruit and coordinate across departments, deal with general education requirements, etc.) Once McNeese has built up its internal resources and capabilities, it can consider expanding to other kinds of programs (e.g., associate's or bachelor's degrees and baccalaureate and post-baccalaureate certificates). However, if one or more of these other kinds of programs is compelling and does not offer significant barriers, it may also be considered at the early stages. (McNeese can discuss such program ideas with its partner, which will have a great deal of relevant, applicable experience.)

Also, McNeese may want to base its initial online offerings on programs already approved and delivered on campus, since (1) the subject matter expertise for those programs already exists at McNeese and (2) approvals will be easier to obtain. This is not a hard-and-fast rule, however. Many institutions build variants of existing programs, combined-subject degrees, or sometimes even new programs, but usually based on existing faculty expertise.

Program Selection Process

McNeese will select programs to be offered online in cooperation with its partner. The steps in doing so, which are shown in **Figure 2**, are further explained below:

Figure 2:
Process for Program Selection



Step One: Identify High Potential Programs

McNeese will first consider which of its existing graduate programs would likely rank high on the following criteria:

- Is recognized for its high quality and strong reputation
- Enjoys significant market size and demand (on a local, a regional and a national basis)
- Where possible, delivers specific professional benefits (e.g., employability, raises, promotions, qualification for licenses, etc.)
- Lends itself to being delivered effectively online

Notes:

- A strong program may not rank high on all criteria.
- McNeese will benefit from its partner's advice on the last criterion, since (1) good instructional designers can often find creative and effective ways of delivering content online that others assume cannot be done and (2) McNeese's partner will have experience judging programs accordingly.

Step Two: Narrow List Based on Qualitative Knowledge

McNeese and its partner will discuss, based on their collective knowledge of the disciplines in question and the markets for their programs, which of the candidate programs to evaluate more closely.

Step Three: Conduct Market Research

McNeese's partner will conduct or commission market research on selected programs. (Since they are assuming the majority of the financial risk, it will be very important for them to be convinced of each program's potential.) Final selection, then, will be based on the market research results.

**Starting
Point for the
Initial List**

Although analysis of McNeese's degrees is beyond the scope of this planning process, we did ask interviewees which degree programs they considered strong candidates for offering online. The majority of current master's degree programs were mentioned, as well as a number of bachelor's degree programs that could be offered online or form the foundation for master's degree programs. Those degrees, which are listed in **Table 2**, can serve as a starting point in building the initial list to be considered in **Step One: Identify High Potential Programs**.

Table 2:
Suggested Subjects for McNeese to Offer Online

Discipline	Subject/Degree
Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accounting (currently offer bachelor's only) Master's in Business Administration
Chemistry	Forensic Chemistry (currently offer bachelor's only)
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction Master of Education in Educational Leadership Master of Education in Educational Technology Leadership Master of Education in Special Education (concentrations currently available in Advanced Professional, Autism Spectrum Disorders, and Educational Diagnostician) Master of Education in School Counseling Master of Arts in Teaching (for individuals who have already earned a bachelor's degree)
Engineering	Master's in Engineering (concentrations currently available in Chemical, Civil, Electrical, Mechanical Engineering and Engineering Management)
Engineering Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Process (currently offer associate's and bachelor's only) Instrumentation (currently offer associate's and bachelor's only) Electronics (currently offer associate's and bachelor's only)
Engineering/Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Master's in Engineering/MBA (not currently offered) Master's in Engineering Management (see Engineering)
Liberal Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing Criminal Justice (currently offer bachelor's only)
Nursing and Allied Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Master's in Nursing (MSN) RN to MSN and/or BA/BS to MSN
Psychology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Master of Arts in Psychology (concentrations currently available in Addiction Treatment, Applied Behavior Analysis, Counseling Psychology, and General/Experimental Psychology)

Note: This list is based on subjective opinions, since it is based on the perspectives of the individuals interviewed. Other interviewees might have suggested different programs.

Master’s degree programs not mentioned include the following:

- English
- Environmental and Chemical Sciences
- Health and Human Performance
- Instructional Technology
- Mathematical Sciences

Other possibilities not mentioned are combined programs such as the following, which are not currently offered by McNeese but would leverage resident expertise:

- Master’s In Nursing/MBA or Master’s in Nursing Administration
- Master’s in Nursing Education
- Engineering Technology and Management

**McNeese’s
 Current
 Online
 Degree
 Programs**

Degree programs currently offered online by McNeese, all of which were created through consortia, are listed in **Table 3:**

**Table 3:
 Online Programs Currently Offered by McNeese**

Level and Affiliation	Subject/Degree
Undergraduate via CALL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bachelor’s in Criminal Justice (degree completion program) ● Bachelor of Arts in Family and Child Studies ● Bachelor of Arts in Sociology ● Bachelor of Science in Management
Graduate via ICMSN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Master of Science in Nursing

**How Will
 New
 Programs
 Relate to
 Existing
 Programs?**

McNeese should continue to support the online courses it already offers. This is important, since those courses serve the needs of McNeese’s on-campus students. McNeese’s CALL programs and the ICMSN online Master’s in Science of Nursing should also be supported as long as they continue to make sense for McNeese.

For practical reasons, however, significant resources—human or financial—should not be diverted away from the activities called for in this plan in order to grow McNeese’s individual online course offerings or to build new CALL programs. Similarly, the effort to finish putting all of McNeese’s GenEd courses online should be given a lower priority.

However, once the online programs proposed in this plan are well underway and generating revenues to support other activities, McNeese can turn its attention and energies back to these other online activities if they are determined at that time to make sense for McNeese.

**Other
Curricular
Consider-
ations**

Equivalence of Online and Onsite Credentials

No distinction between online and face-to-face programs should be made on transcripts or diplomas. McNeese should not commit to offering online programs unless it believes that they will deliver equivalent or superior learning outcomes compared with onsite programs. If McNeese believes that, then there is no reason to distinguish between the two delivery methods.

Other Alternative Learning Methods

In its 2011 report (p. 4), AELAG suggested that McNeese “centralize alternative learning delivery methods with the intent to ‘tie’ them together” and “to develop ‘learning packages’ for adult learners.” Here they were referring to non-traditional methods other than online education, e.g., cassettes, compressed video-teleconferencing, and various methods of assessing prior learning such as CLEP and other credit by examination, and portfolios. These should not be given high priority at this time, i.e., those methods should be clearly distinguished from what is proposed here, and funds should not be funneled away from the main initiative to address them. Rather, priority should be placed on developing and delivering fully online programs.

Responsibility for these other methods should be placed under the organization overseeing non-traditional education activities. When it has the resources to do so, it can turn its attention back to them. Whether and how they will be pursued should be decided by the function’s leadership at that time, based on a combination of market needs and economic viability. (The award of credit for prior learning, in particular, can help in student recruitment, but would likely play a greater role at the undergraduate level than at the graduate level.)

Call for All Departments to Offer Online Programs

AELAG (see 2011 report, p. 3) called for the president and/or provost to mandate that each college have at least one program completely available online by 2013. While this would send a strong and desirable message about McNeese’s commitment to online education, ensure broad

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involvement, and increase the number of online programs, it would violate the principle that programs should be evaluated and prioritized according to market potential. In other words, it may make more strategic sense for McNeese to focus its efforts, at least in the short term, more on some fields than on others.

STUDENT AND FACULTY SERVICES

Importance of Services

McNeese’s motto—which it takes very seriously—is *Excellence with a Personal Touch*. During our interviews we heard some misgivings about McNeese’s ability to deliver *Excellence with a personal touch* in online programs. In our experience, however, such excellence *can* be achieved through the delivery of comprehensive and conscientious services to online degree students and to the faculty members who teach them. That “personal touch” is important not only because it is consistent with McNeese’s culture, values and practices, but also for practical reasons:

- Because excellent service provided to prospective online students *during the student inquiry/recruitment process* demonstrates that a school is serious about service and will be responsive to their needs throughout their studies, it therefore increases yield rates (i.e., is an important recruitment tool).
- Excellent service provided to online students *during their studies* helps ensure both a positive student experience and successful educational outcomes, which in turn is reflected in strong retention and graduation rates. A positive student experience and successful outcomes also reflect positively on the school and its brand/reputation, which further helps attract more students to both onsite and online programs.
- Excellent services provided to the staff and instructors for online degree programs ensure that they can focus on their teaching and not on distracting administrative details. This is then reflected in the quality of the education they provide which, again, helps retain existing students, heightens the school’s reputation and attracts additional students.

Services Currently Available at McNeese

Student Services

Most students currently taking online courses at McNeese are enrolled in onsite programs. Because they have direct access to on-campus services, online support services are not as important for them as they will be for students in fully online programs. For that reason, remotely delivered services for them are limited mainly to McNeese’s technology support help desk, which is located in the information technology function, can be accessed by all McNeese students and personnel, and is available from 7:45AM-4:30PM Central Time.

Students in McNeese's CALL programs also receive support from the Office of Electronic Learning. CALL students may telephone or email the E-Learning Administrative Coordinator with requests for support. With help from the office's director, Dr. Helen Ware, she also provides student advisement services. (According to Dr. Ware, her office also receives occasional requests for support from students in non-CALL courses and, while they help where they can, they try to minimize such activities.)

McNeese's undergraduate students have traditionally received a Blackboard training module as part of their freshman orientation. A comparable module for Moodle, McNeese's new LMS, should be part of the orientation provided to all of McNeese's online degree students.

Faculty Services

The primary support mechanism for faculty involved in online courses at McNeese is a training program arranged by the Office of Electronic Learning and delivered by a consultant, which prepares faculty members to design and develop their own courses. It introduces them to the LMS and other programs used in developing and delivering online courses, and includes the creation of an actual online course. The original semester-long program was recently shortened.

Faculty members may also telephone or email the Office of Electronic Learning with questions or requests, including password assistance, uploading syllabi and publishing courses online.

The next two sections describe the services that are often provided to students and instructors in online degree programs, and that we suggest be considered here.

Student Services

Enrollment Counseling

When prospective students respond to McNeese's marketing (see **Marketing the Proposed Online Programs** starting on p. 44) by requesting program information, they will either call or receive a call from an enrollment counselor, who will give them their first experience of the services associated with McNeese's online programs. These enrollment counselors will answer perspective students' questions, guide them, as needed, through the application process, and collect their completed applications, which they will convey to the appropriate academic departments at McNeese. Each enrollment counselor will have been

thoroughly oriented and trained by McNeese's partner (see **Enrollment Management** starting on p. 45 for more details) to ensure appropriate interactions, in-depth knowledge of McNeese and its programs, and high standards of customer service.

Student Training

Once admitted to a McNeese online program, each new student will receive training such as the following:

- **Student Orientation:** The instructional designers provided by McNeese's partner will work with McNeese to create a student orientation program that will introduce new students to the university (including its mission, goals and programs), as well as to online learning at McNeese. The latter will include insights that will help students to succeed online.
- **Introduction to the LMS:** Students will take an online student training course to ensure that they are familiar with the LMS interface and its full functionality, and are well prepared to flourish in the online environment.
- **Introduction to McNeese Library Resources:** See **Library and Information Resources** on p. 39.

Student Retention Services

It is in McNeese's best interest to achieve as high a retention rate as possible in its online programs. In addition to offering high-quality, engaging academic programming and excellent online instruction, McNeese can achieve this by providing its online students with the highest levels of service. (Other institutions offering similar services have reported retention rates of 90% or higher.) Student service may be provided through several channels, each of which will be explained clearly to the students at the outset of their studies. Those channels are the following:

- **For Academic Issues:** When students have questions regarding a particular class, they will be encouraged to correspond directly with their instructor. If students (1) have communicated directly with the instructor but are not satisfied with the outcome or (2) have academic issues that span multiple classes or the program as a whole, they will contact their program's academic program director directly.
- **For Administrative or Any Other Non-Academic Issues:** When a student is admitted into a McNeese online program, there will be a

formal handoff from his/her enrollment counselor to his/her student retention specialist (sometimes called a *student services specialist* or *representative*), who will help with any issues other than the academic issues referred to above. Student retention specialists will be well trained professional coaches provided by McNeese's partner. Based on a model inspired by executive coaching, they will work one on one with the online students to improve their engagement, persistence and success. Their ongoing observations can also provide McNeese with valuable insights into students' experiences in their online programs.

Student retention specialists will work in two ways, one active and the other passive. The first is to track the students' activities and performance and to contact them when they see issues (e.g., not logging on regularly, missing assignments, or receiving low grades). The student retention specialist will then work with the student to understand any issues and identify solutions. The second way is to receive inquiries or requests for help from students, usually by telephone or email. These inquiries may involve a wide range of issues, including questions about the learning management system, how to complete administrative tasks (e.g., paying bills, applying for financial aid, checking grades, registering in courses) and how to succeed as an online student (e.g., study strategies and time management).

When first enrolling in a program, each student will learn who his or her student retention specialist is and how to contact him/her. The students and student retention specialists will interact over time and build relationships and rapport. (While students will have new instructors from semester to semester, they will always have the same student retention specialist.) When issues arise, the students' inclination will be to contact their student retention specialist. The student retention specialist will then (1) either address non-academic issues or refer them to someone who can, or (2) refer academic issues to the academic program director.

Ideally, student retention specialists, when hired, will have a master's degree (although otherwise well qualified bachelor's-trained candidates are also considered), one to two years of experience in higher education administration or student services, and an ability and passion for building strong personal relationships, solving problems, working independently and taking initiative. Once hired, they will receive their company's student retention training, which will introduce them to the duties and

responsibilities of the job, cover how to interact with faculty and students and provide high levels of customer service, and prepare them for the wide range of situations they will be called on to deal with in their work. Then, when they are assigned to a McNeese program, they will be oriented to McNeese and trained in all aspects of the program to which they will be assigned, its student demographics, the academic program director-student retention specialist relationship (and in particular, the boundaries between the two roles and the issues that the student retention specialist will refer to the academic program director), and McNeese's administrative structure, processes and personnel.

Academic Advising

The departments will be responsible for academic advisement, with the academic program directors advising the students in their online programs initially. When those programs have grown sufficiently to justify it, the departments will appoint or hire academic advisors. At that time the departments will define the selection criteria (subject to any McNeese policies that will have been defined), identify candidates, and make their own selections. (They might, for example, elect to use doctorally-prepared faculty members; alternatively, they could opt for master's-prepared professional advisors.) Those academic advisors would likely be appointed on a part-time basis initially, but could eventually fill the role full time.

Library and Information Resources

All online courses will include projects that require students to use library resources. Those requirements will increase as students advance from lower- to higher-level courses. To meet that need, McNeese will provide them with the same extensive array of online library resources that the Frazar Memorial Library provides remotely to McNeese's current students. As this suggests, online students will have all of the same rights and privileges in using McNeese's library resources that on-campus students have. And, while most of them will never use McNeese's *physical* library facilities, they will regularly access McNeese's extensive online resources, including a wide range of subscription databases, electronic books, journals, periodical indexes, images and data, all accessible with a student login and password.

For personalized reference services, online students will be free to access standard remote reference services by telephone, online chat or email, if they so choose. But they may also have access to more specialized library

support. As is suggested in **Table 7** on p. 59, a distance education librarian position could be created when online enrollments justify it. S/he would have a thorough understanding of the needs of online students and be familiar with their courses and assignments, and so would be well prepared to help. Among his/her responsibilities could be the development of an online orientation to McNeese’s library and its services, which will be tailored specifically to the needs of the university’s online students.

24/7 Technical Support

Through McNeese’s partner, we expect that an external service will be retained to provide technical support during those hours not covered by McNeese’s current technical support desk. Depending on McNeese’s needs, this service, which would likely be available via telephone, email and chat, could also be provided to the university’s on-campus students, faculty and staff (at additional cost to the university, of course). As help desk volume increases, McNeese can decide whether to further build its internal technical support capabilities or to continue to outsource it.

Faculty Services

Instructional Design/Course Development and Related Project Management

As part of your partnership agreement, McNeese’s partner will provide the services of instructional designers trained in adult learning and online pedagogies. To set the stage for program development, McNeese and its partner will work with McNeese to develop a McNeese online “look and feel”—i.e., an overall design, a color scheme, and visual elements—to be shared by all McNeese online programs and courses. Then, during program/course development, these instructional designers will use their expertise in effective design and pedagogy to help McNeese’s subject matter experts to translate academic content into effective online courses.

Each SME will, essentially, be the “author” of the course to which s/he is assigned. Having completed a training course in developing content for online delivery, s/he will be paired with an instructional designer. The two will work closely together, the instructional designer translating the SME’s content into the online format. Based on the course design and content, McNeese’s partner will develop and incorporate into the course whatever media are required (audio, video, animations, etc.), test and quality-check the course, and upload it onto McNeese’s LMS server. During the critical development period, the partner will likely appoint a project manager to

McNeese, who will be temporarily officed at the university and will act as a liaison (and, where needed, a trouble-shooter) between the online education function, the departments, the SMEs, the partner's management, and the instructional designer(s).

Faculty Training

Faculty members directly involved in the proposed programs will receive training in areas such as the following:

- **The LMS:** Any faculty member involved in these programs—whether development or delivery—must be familiar with the learning management system (LMS) on which McNeese will host those programs. McNeese has used Blackboard in the past, but is transitioning to Moodle. The Office of Electronic Learning has already initiated Moodle training, which some faculty members have completed. Those who have not and who will serve as SMEs or instructors for the new online programs will be expected to be trained in Moodle before assuming those responsibilities.
- **Developing Online Courses:** Subject matter experts will receive training from the instructional designers assigned to work with them. The extent of the training they receive will be a function of their previous relevant experience. (Those who have already been trained in online course development by the Office of Electronic Learning will require far less training than those who have not.)
- **Teaching Online:** McNeese's partner will likely offer an online course in how to teach effectively online. It will explain online learning pedagogy, introduce adult learning theory, review the online learning environment, and provide tips and reading materials to help instructors-to-be to plan for their online learning environment and understand how best to help their students learn online. Such courses are usually offered online not just because online education professionals believe in the power of online instruction, but also because they tend to feel strongly that instructors in an online environment need to understand the online student experience. Since the Office of Electronic Learning's training also covers teaching online, McNeese will likely want to compare the two offerings and determine whether faculty members who have completed the McNeese training will also be expected to take the partner's course.

Other Ongoing Faculty Support and Development

Faculty support will come from two sources. On the academic side, the academic program director will be the first line of support when online instructors have teaching- or student-related issues or questions. Similarly, when student retention specialists have identified student issues in which an online instructor needs to become involved, the academic program director will facilitate discussions among the various parties. On the administrative side, McNeese's online education function will oversee faculty support, i.e., solving administrative problems, scheduling, etc. As online enrollments grow, staff members will be added to extend that capability.

There is discussion in the online education community about the importance of integrating online faculty—especially those teaching on an adjunct basis—into their host universities generally and their departments specifically, as well as creating a sense of community among them. With these needs in mind, McNeese may consider various strategies and tactics for integrating externally-sourced online instructors and SMEs into the university:

- **Subject Matter Experts:** Because any SMEs who are not full-time faculty members are likely to have been recruited via the networks of those who are, they will likely already have ties to the department in question. The academic program director will need to make sure at the outset that they have a thorough understanding of the university (including its mission, goals and programs), the department, and McNeese's standards for the development of online courses. For periods during which they are developing their courses, they may be included in faculty communications and attend faculty meetings (by telephone, where necessary). The academic program director may also communicate with them regularly and arrange formal opportunities for them to coordinate their activities and share information.
- **Online Instructors:** Organizing adjunct faculty can be very challenging, since many of them prefer to operate independently. To the extent that McNeese believes such organization is important, it may want to consider mechanisms such as the following for promoting integration, engagement and information sharing:
 - Remunerate them for time spent on integration/community-building activities
 - Include them in faculty meetings

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Student and Faculty Services

- Elicit their evaluation of the courses and the teaching experience
- Hold virtual “brownbag lunches” (i.e., facilitated sessions to bring online instructors together across programs via a web conferencing or virtual classroom tool to hear speakers, discuss experiences and lessons learned, or solve problems)
- Organize an online instructor listserv

24/7 Technical Support

Faculty members should have the same access as students to the technical support services described under **24/7 Technical Support** on p. 40 above.

MARKETING AND ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

Current Marketing Activities

The marketing of McNeese’s current online courses and programs is reportedly limited to the following:

- Descriptions on McNeese’s and several related⁵ websites.
 - Paid advertising by CALL for its programs, including billboards
 - Postcards and brochures for CALL programs and online education generally, scheduled to be printed and mailed to schools
 - Visits to sheriff’s departments for the CALL program in Criminal Justice Administration
-

Marketing the Proposed Online Programs

In recognition of how online education students obtain program information, McNeese should communicate the proposed online programs primarily through electronic means. Web developers employed by its partner will work with its online education function to develop a marketing microsite for each McNeese online program—i.e., a cluster of web pages that will (1) include one or more pages addressing each program, (2) operate within www.mcneese.edu domain, and (3) be dedicated to marketing and promoting its online programs.⁶ The departments will also insert information about students’ onsite and online options in their own web pages, and include links to the marketing microsite.

McNeese’s partner will manage the microsities, which could:

- Provide a profile of McNeese
- Enable students to determine their readiness for online education via a self-assessment tool

⁵ For example:

- The University of Louisiana System’s *Online Degree Program* website: <http://www.ulsystem.edu/index.cfm?md=pagebuilder&tmp=home&nid=85&pnid=69&pid=238&fmid=0&catid=0&elid=0>
- The ICMSN website and related websites: <http://www.nursingconsortium.org/> and http://www.selu.edu/acad_research/depts/nurs/grad_degree/index.html
- The CALL website: http://www.yourcalla.org/McNeese_State_University

⁶ An example of a marketing microsite (this one for Ohio University’s online Master of Health Administration program) can be found at <http://healthadmin.ohio.edu/>. A non-program-specific site for the same institution is found at <http://www.ohio.edu/ecampus/about/index.htm>.

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Marketing and Enrollment Management

- Clearly address key information about each program, e.g., its subject matter thrust, the students for whom it is appropriate, admission requirements and prerequisites, learning outcomes, structure and curriculum, schedules, completion requirements, financial aid, tuition and fees, relevant administrative policies, and frequently asked questions (FAQs)
- Provide links to program brochures in the PDF format and an opportunity to request additional information

To create awareness of McNeese’s online programs and to lead prospective students to the microsites, the partner will plan and implement marketing campaigns that could include advertising in online education directories, pay-per-click advertising, banner ads, search engine optimization (SEO), and program-specific pages on social networking websites such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter.

Enrollment Management

If McNeese’s partner provides enrollment management services, it will likely provide dedicated enrollment counselors who will offer the enrollment counseling services described under **Student Services** starting on p. 36, i.e., answering questions, providing guidance, etc. These enrollment counselors will be thoroughly oriented and trained by members of the McNeese Admissions Office staff to ensure appropriate interactions, thorough knowledge of McNeese and its programs, and high standards of customer service. The orientation/training could take place on the McNeese campus or by videoconferencing,⁷ and will include an introduction to McNeese and information on McNeese’s online degrees, academic calendar, application process, tuition and fees, and financial aid. **These enrollment counselors will not receive commissions.** (McNeese should select a partner that is clearly dedicated to the highest ethical standards in recruiting and believes that the market will reward clear, honest and responsible communication in the long term.) They may also collect data on website traffic, inquiries and applications, and communicate them to McNeese.

Prospective students will apply online. Applications will be collected and reviewed by McNeese’s partner who, having obtained each program’s admissions standards, will filter out students who clearly do not meet

⁷ In-person training offers the advantage of a richer and deeper experience of McNeese; videoconferencing, meanwhile, allows the session to be recorded and accessed by new enrollment counselors and McNeese staff members in the future.

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Marketing and Enrollment Management

those standards, and submit the rest to the relevant McNeese department, which will make the admission decisions.

**Marketing
Other
McNeese
Online
Offerings**

As we envision it, the marketing provided by McNeese's partner will not involve or impact the marketing of McNeese's CALL or ICMSN programs. While McNeese and its partner could explore a side-deal to market some or all of the existing online programs if it makes sense to do so, they should carefully consider how it would involve or impact other consortium members.

Meanwhile, we believe that the individual online courses already offered should not be marketed.

SOURCING STRATEGY

Is this Outsourcing?

Q: Is the proposed partnering arrangement outsourcing?

A: No. It is a funding and capability-building strategy.

We prefer not to think of the proposed partnering arrangement as outsourcing—at least not in the classic sense—since organizations usually outsource a function because they are not interested in doing it themselves. The strategic reasons often involve (1) a decision that the outsourced function is peripheral to their core activities, and/or (2) a desire to achieve greater efficiencies and/or reduce costs.

Those are not the reasons why McNeese will form the partnership called for in this plan. Here the function in question—which involves designing, developing, building, delivering and managing world-class online education programs—will be very important to McNeese. And here it is very desirable that McNeese have those capabilities in house. But current circumstances do not enable McNeese to develop them. The motivation behind seeking a partnership, therefore, is to gain access to (1) the funding that will be necessary to design, develop and deliver online programs initially and (2) expertise in those areas that can be absorbed by McNeese as it uses tuition revenues from the new programs to enhance its own internal capabilities.

The rest of this **Sourcing Strategy** chapter expands on what was introduced under **Partnering** in the **Online Education Model** chapter, starting on p. 15. It includes the following sections:

- Potential Partners
- The Process of Selecting a Partner
- Other Aspects of How a Partnership Could Work
- How to Approach the Partnership

Potential Partners

Over the past decade-plus, a number of companies have appeared whose purpose is to partner with higher education institutions to help them put programs online. Among the first were Embanet and Compass Knowledge Group (which have since merged) and Bisk Education. In the past several years, a number of others—including the first, and so far the only, not-for-profit player—have joined the fray. The most prominent players in the market are listed in **Table 4** below.

Table 4:
Prominent Players Offering Relevant Services

Companies	Comments
Not-for-Profit	
Educators Serving Educators (ESE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A division of Excelsior College (a leading, regionally accredited online college) ● Distinguishers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The only not-for-profit in the field - With its roots in academia, it “shares clients’ values and understands their challenges” - Offers the shortest contract durations in the field (five years vs. up to 10 for competitors) - Explicitly stated goal is to prepare clients to operate independently ● Target: Smaller to medium-sized schools ● Website: www.eseserves.com ● Relevant article: http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/03/30/excelsior-aims-help-take-other-nonprofits-online
For-Profit Companies	
EmbanetCompass	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Combines two of the original players, so has a lot of experience and a long client list ● After merger, began to position itself as a supplier to large, big-name schools, and reportedly began turning away lower-profile schools ● Favors long contracts and is reputed to take high revenue shares ● Website: www.embanetcompass.com
2tor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The hip, glitzy player in the field; claims to be one of the richest, appealing to a “snob factor”; claims to be “picky” about which schools it will work with ● Distinguisher: Spends a lot of money on very high production values and claims to “inject a dose of Hollywood” into its courses ● Target: high-profile, top-tier universities ● Website: www.2tor.com ● Relevant article: http://chronicle.com/article/What-Makes-a-Top-Tier-Online/131395/

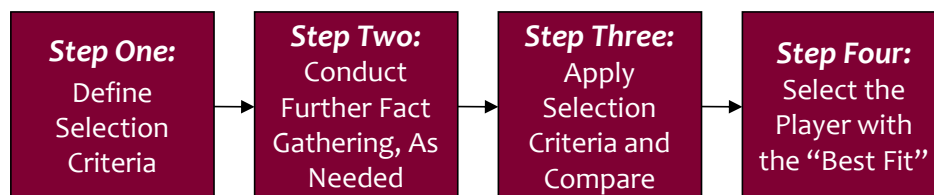
Sourcing Strategy

Companies	Comments
Academic Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Formerly Higher Education Holdings (HEH), which has a checkered past; Academic Partnerships website makes no mention of Higher Education Holdings; reputed to focus on profit over quality ● Works with Lamar and ULL (among others) ● Distinguishers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – In order to generate high volumes of students, prices programs significantly below on-campus equivalents and designs them to take less time to complete – Specializes in working with state schools ● Founded by controversial banker, for-profit education entrepreneur and Lamar graduate Randy Best (http://motherjones.com/politics/2008/09/hooded-phonies) ● Website: www.academicpartnerships.com ● Relevant article: http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2009/03/24/heh
The LearningHouse, Inc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● An early entrant into the field (2001) ● Specializes in working with small private colleges ● Purchased in 2011 by a company led by a former Kaplan Inc. executive ● Website: www.learninghouse.com
Colloquy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A division of Kaplan, Inc. and the Washington Post Company ● Website: www.colloquy360.com; also http://www.kaplanglobalsolutions.com/index.php/solutions/solutions-colloquy
Deltak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Target: “Prestigious private and public institutions” ● Website: http://www.deltak-innovation.com
Bisk Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● One of the first players in the field ● In addition to helping higher education institutions put their programs online, offers services related to (1) executive education and training and (2) preparation for standardized tests ● Website: www.bisk.com
Ellucian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ellucian is the new name for the recent combination of Datatel and SunGard Higher Education ● SunGard Higher Education’s Academics Group launched Total Online Program services (TOPs) in 2009 ● The company has the advantage of pre-existing relationships with existing higher education clients who use its software and processing systems ● Website: www.ellucian.com and http://www.sungardhe.com ● Relevant press release: http://www.sungard.com/pressreleases/2009/higheredo32409.aspx

**The Process
of Selecting a
Partner**

If McNeese prefers a highly structured decision-making process, it may want to use a process like the one depicted in **Figure 3**.

Figure 3:
Process for Partner Selection



Note: Even if a less formal or structured process is used, decision makers should follow the spirit of this process, thinking carefully about what is important to McNeese in selecting a partner and which player or players conform best to its standards.

Step Three, which is the heart of the process and the most time-consuming step, will probably include a gradual paring down of the list of prospective partners and direct contact with one or more companies. It could also include some preliminary negotiation of an agreement.

**Other
Aspects of
How a
Partnership
Could Work**

Negotiating Flexibility

Arrangements with partner organizations can often be very flexible, depending on the institution's needs and resources. For example, the partner organization may decrease its share of the tuition revenues if the academic institution can invest some money upfront in course development. This brings to mind the AELAG's suggestion (in its 2009 report, p. 7) that McNeese use restricted revenues to build its online presence. Our understanding is that restricted revenues cannot be used for recurring costs (e.g., salaries), but can be used for one-time investments. Committing all or a substantial portion of those funds to the partnership, perhaps over multiple years, could be very advantageous to McNeese.

It is also common for partner organizations to use a portion of their share of program revenues to pay for or contribute to the salaries of some or all university personnel involved in the shared programs. This may include academic program directors, administrative staff needed as a result of the creation of the programs, and faculty teaching the online courses. Such

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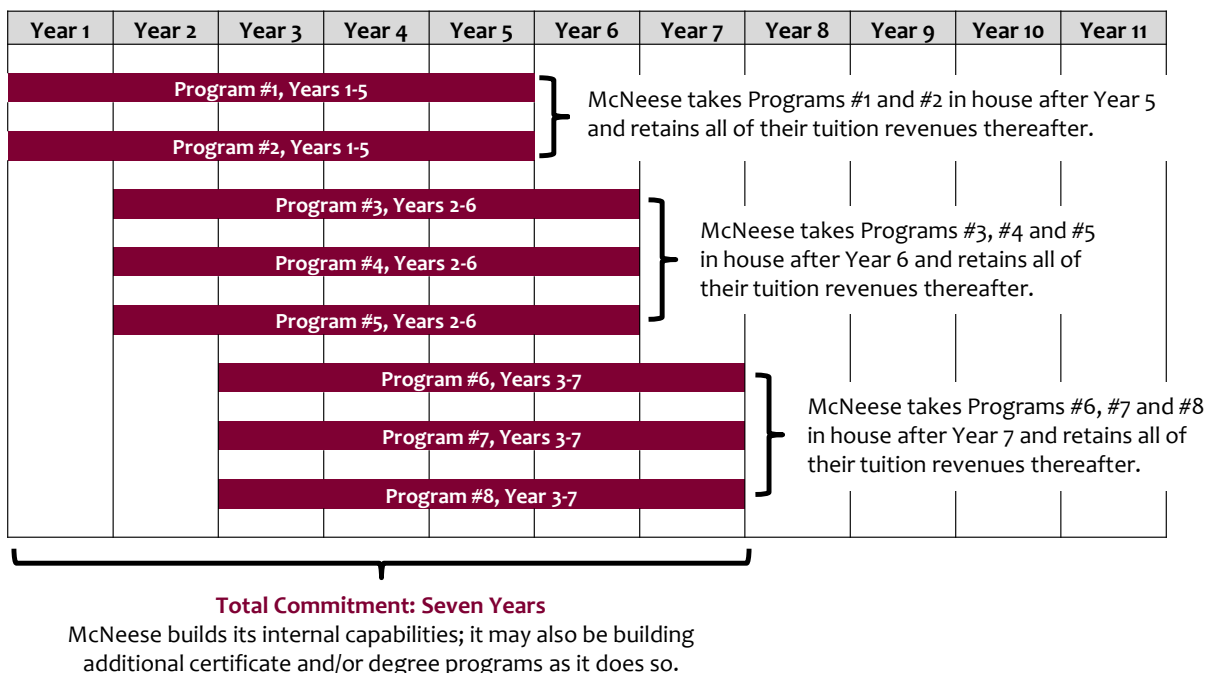
funds are usually transferred to the partner institution rather than paid directly, since direct payments could raise concerns about the institution’s control over the academic aspects of the programs.

Given the flexibility of the partnering arrangements, McNeese should try to be as creative as it can be in negotiating its partnership agreement.

Contract Length and Duration of Commitment

As noted earlier (see p. 17), contracts like those discussed in this plan may last between five and 10 years, depending on the partner and the terms agreed to. Because a partnership may involve multiple agreements, the duration of McNeese’s commitment to its partnership may exceed the length of any single agreement. For example, if McNeese entered into a hypothetical five-year agreement that called for two programs to be built in year 1, a second five-year agreement for three additional programs to be built in Year 2 and a third agreement for three programs in Year 3, then McNeese would have committed to the partnership for a total of seven years. Adding programs or signing longer-term agreements could increase the overall length of the commitment. The scenario outlined above is illustrated in **Figure 4**.

Figure 4:
Gantt Chart Depicting the Hypothetical Scenario



Notes on Figure 4:

- Although the programs depicted in **Figure 4** are subject to five-year agreements, McNeese should not expect all prospective partners to be open to such short commitments.
- As **Figure 4** also indicates, McNeese can begin building its internal capabilities well before it takes any of the shared programs in house (depending on the availability of funding from those programs) and may begin building additional programs internally as it does so.
- Just as the start of the programs would be staggered over the first three years, so would the expirations of the agreements and therefore the insourcing of program activities. This would allow McNeese to ramp up its responsibilities for those programs over time and ensure that it would not be overwhelmed by having to bring all of them in house at the same time.

The Revenue Sharing Model

Again, how agreements are structured may differ by partner, but it is not uncommon for revenues to be shared according to a “stepped” model that grants larger shares to the academic institution as the number of students increases. **Table 5** demonstrates how this might work.

Table 5:
“Stepped” Revenue Sharing Model⁸

Number of Students	School’s Share
1 through X	Y%
X+1 through X+50	Y+5%
X+51 through X+100	Y+10%
X+101 through X+150	Y+15%
≥ X+151	Y+20%

Other Possible Negotiating Points

Since McNeese has had concerns about compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in the past, it should be sure to discuss the need for all online courses and other web-based communications to be in strict compliance with ADA standards. How this is achieved could involve development costs above and beyond those that the partner might typically incur, so it makes sense to be explicit about this need sooner rather than later, since it is easier to include it in an agreement at the outset than it is to add it after the fact.

⁸ This table is for purposes of illustration only and is not meant to imply any actual numbers or step intervals.

**How to
Approach
the
Partnership**

We are aware that McNeese is involved in a number of major partnerships already, so it may not be necessary to raise the following points, but it cannot hurt to do so. A partnership of the magnitude of what is proposed in this plan is a major undertaking. It involves a lengthy commitment, large sums of money and McNeese's name and credibility. Such partnerships should not be entered into lightly; once McNeese enters one, it must expect to stay the course and make it work.

Having said that, this or any partnership between two organizations is unlikely to proceed without challenges, since any two organizations differ in their cultures, philosophies and the personalities of their individual players. For that reason, a partnership is like a marriage—except on a different scale, of course—in which both partners must expect to encounter issues, be prepared to work through them, and find ways to make the partnership succeed.

ORGANIZATION AND OPERATIONS

About this Chapter

This chapter includes sections on a range of organizational and operational issues and how they might be dealt with. Those sections include the following:

- A Wider Organization to Oversee Alternative Learning
- Other Staffing Needs
- Advisory and Operations Bodies
- Approval Process for Online Programs
- Ensuring the Quality of Online Programs
- Agreements with Subject Matter Experts
- Online Education's Role in the Reward Structure
- Agreements with Faculty to Teach Online Courses
- Revenue Sharing Model
- Academic Advising

A Wider Organization to Oversee Alternative Learning

The plan proposed in this document implies a far wider scope of work than is currently being conducted by McNeese's Office of Electronic Learning. Changes in the online learning function will therefore be needed as this plan unfolds. Our experience suggests, however, that those changes should not be limited to the online education function. Rather, it will make sense for McNeese to implement more comprehensive organizational changes that bring together all forms of alternative/nontraditional learning in a single, entrepreneurial organization.

We therefore suggest the creation of a separate college or school to incubate, support and, where appropriate, manage all forms of nontraditional education on behalf of the provost's office. At its heart, it will be a service unit whose mission will involve working with the other colleges to promote nontraditional education generally and online education specifically, at McNeese.

Scope and Responsibilities

The components of its portfolio of educational activities and services could include those listed in **Table 6** below.

Table 6:
**Functions or Services that Might Be Included in the Organization
 Overseeing Nontraditional Education**

Function or Service	Currently Reports to ...
Online Education	The Provost’s Office
Leisure Learning and Dual Enrollment	Enrollment Management
Community Services and Outreach	Enrollment Management
General and Basic Studies	Enrollment Management
Administration of Articulation Agreements	Enrollment Management
Continuing Education	The College of Engineering
The Institute for Industry-Education Collaboration	The College of Engineering
Military Partnerships	Registrar’s Office

Note: We recognize that there are initiatives at McNeese that were founded through the entrepreneurial activities of individuals who are invested in their success. It might not serve these initiatives to be separated from their founders. So, if it does not make sense to place these initiatives directly under the umbrella of the nontraditional education unit, that unit could instead be charged with providing them with incubation support and services—and perhaps a brand under which they can be marketed, e.g., *McNeese Professional Education*.

Rationale

By putting all of these nontraditional education functions in a single unit overseen by one person, McNeese is paving the way for the creation of a single, integrated nontraditional education strategy, for optimizing the potential for the unit as a whole to be managed systematically, and for its constituent units to cooperate effectively.

Name

Traditionally, a unit like the one described might have been called something like “University College.” While a distinguished name, it does not effectively convey the unit’s nature or purpose. More descriptive names for such units include things like “the College of Continuing and Professional Studies” or “the College of Extended Education,” or more current names like “McNeese Without Boundaries” or “McNeese After Hours.” (For convenience’s sake, we will hereafter refer to this nontraditional education unit as “the ‘extended education’ function.”)

Notes:

- In selecting a name, consider that it may only be used internally. While some schools brand their online programs with names like “McNeese Online,” it may be advisable not to position them externally as separate from the rest of McNeese’s academic offerings. If McNeese’s online programs are not differentiated by such a name, online degree students will arguably feel more like McNeese students and less like marginalized, peripheral students.
- Since “McNeese Without Boundaries” and “McNeese After Hours” are based on names used by other institutions, McNeese would do well to check for ownership issues before deciding on either.

Culture

The “extended education” function will differ from mainstream academic units in its purpose and operations. To fulfill its purpose successfully, it should be intentionally countercultural, i.e., it should build an entrepreneurial culture that embraces well considered, calculated risks.

Leadership

We suggest the creation of a high-level leadership position that will lead the “extended education” organization and report directly to the provost. Its title should reflect that level of responsibility. It might combine, for example, a senior level administrative title that would give its holder credibility on the administrative side with the title of *dean*, which would entitle him or her to a seat at the academic table and give him or her credibility with the other deans. (For convenience’s sake, we will refer to this position hereafter as the *dean of extended education* or just the *dean/XEd*.)

The person who will fill this position—especially during the first five or so years—should be an experienced administrator but must, above all, have a strong track record as a strategist and builder. S/he should also be a risk-taker who is skilled at generating excitement about new ideas and has a knack for getting things done.

Because this position will be critical to the success of McNeese’s online education plan, it is essential that McNeese find and appoint the right person for this role. If an exemplary candidate is not available internally, McNeese should launch a national search to find one rather than settle for a candidate who, however skilled, does not fit the criteria outlined above. In addition, these other important questions should be considered:

Online Education Plan for McNeese State University

Organization and Operations

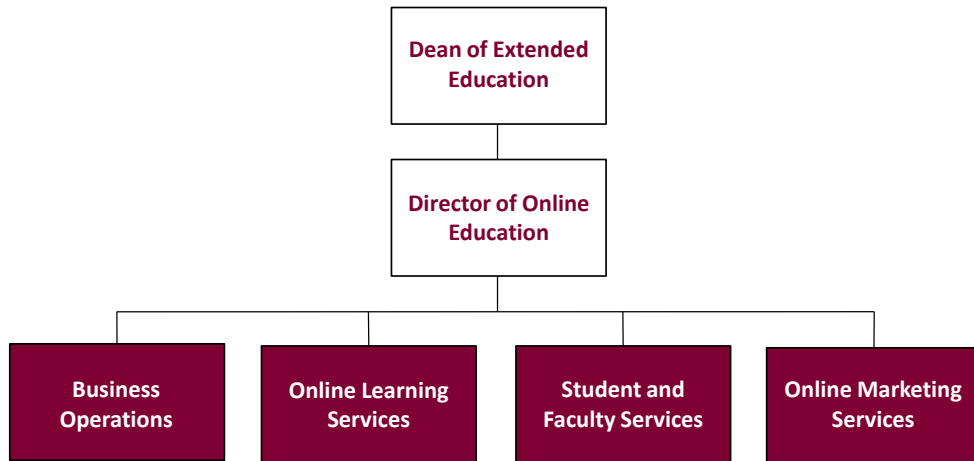
- **Does s/he need to be an academic?** Not necessarily. This is not, in essence, an academic position. So it is more important that s/he have the skills and relevant experiences described above than that s/he have academic credentials.
- **Does s/he need to be an expert in online and other forms of nontraditional education?** Preferably. Ideally, McNeese wants a person who has successfully built an “extended education” organization before and done so very successfully. If the leader is not an expert, s/he should be a proponent of nontraditional education, and needs to have access to someone who does have that expertise, e.g., a Director of Online Education.
- **Above it describes “The person who will fill this position—especially during the first five or so years.” What happens after that?** Once the “startup” phase has been completed, the “extended education” organization will likely enter a new phase in which (1) online programs that have been developed and launched with a partner are brought in house and (2) additional initiatives may be initiated. The qualities required to do this successfully may differ somewhat from those of the startup leader. The latter role may require less “convincing” and deeper expertise in nontraditional education and more hands-on administrative attention. McNeese should consider this “evolution” of the leadership position in its staffing decisions.

The Online Education Unit

The online education function should be one of the units—probably the largest and most challenging—within the “extended education” function. Because of the scale and complexity of its work, the online education unit is likely to need far more attention than the other components of the nontraditional education organization.

The online education unit will have very limited staffing at the outset, but as it grows McNeese should consider adding different subunits, for example, those shown in **Figure 5**.

Figure 5:
Possible Subunits within the Online Education Unit



Specifics will depend on future decisions, e.g., what services McNeese ultimately decides to bring in house and when, and which it will outsource. Online Learning Services would include instructional design and instructional technology services, and would work closely with McNeese’s information technology organization, which would likely continue to manage the online education infrastructure.

Depending on the skills, qualifications and preferences of the dean/XEd, s/he could also play the director of online education role, i.e., lead the online education unit directly, in the short term, or a director could be hired immediately.

Other Staffing Needs

In addition to the dean of extended education position discussed above, various academic and administrative positions will be needed. Examples of the sorts of positions that other institutions have added during the first several years of similar initiatives are shown in **Table 7**.

Table 7:
Examples of New Positions that Could Be Needed to Support Online Programs

Title	Comments
Academic Positions	
Academic Program Directors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One for each program • Faculty positions • Report to department chairs with dotted line to Director of Online Education

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Title	Comments
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Oversee academic content, coordinate with faculty, manage admissions for the department, serve as liaisons to partner ● See description on p. 22
Administrative Positions	
Director of Online Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Will report to the dean/XEd ● May not be needed immediately if the dean/XEd plays a hands-on role, but will probably be needed by the time the first program launches ● May have responsibilities beyond the co-developed programs ● Should have extensive experience with online education, the ability to work with faculty, administrative and project management skills, and the ability to get things done
One or More Financial Aid Staff Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Might reside in the “extended education” function and coordinate with the Financial Aid Office ● One might be needed in Year 1; another could be needed after several years
Distance Education Librarian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Would report to the university librarian and work exclusively with online students
One or More LMS Support Technicians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Would likely reside in IT, but be dedicated to the online programs; would also liaise with the 24/7 help desk team ● One might be needed in Year 1
Up to Five Administrative Staff	<p>Responsibilities would include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Administrative assistant to the dean/XEd ● Admissions ● Accounts payable ● Records and data management ● Applying for permission from other states to serve their students (per recent regulations, McNeese must apply on a state-by-state basis) <p>Whether they reside in “extended education” reporting dotted-line to related units or vice versa needs to be worked out on a case-by-case basis</p>

Notes:

- The staffing described in **Table 7** is assumed to include the headcount and positions that are currently part of the Office of Electronic Learning, but it does not assume any particular individual in any specific position.
- As McNeese’s online programs mature, additional positions will be required. These could include but may not be limited to a director of online marketing and academic advisors.
- The salaries for positions necessitated by the creation and offering of the proposed online programs may be paid for in part or in full by McNeese’s partner, depending on the particulars of the negotiated agreement.

**Advisory and
Operations
Bodies**

AELAG or a Similar Group

As noted on p. 8, McNeese has an Alternative and Electronic Learning Advisory Group (AELAG), a committee composed of faculty and administrators, which advises the provost, serves as champions for online education, and has been asked to do a variety of other fact-finding and analysis tasks. AELAG or some other similar group should continue to operate, but its mission and role are likely to change and should be carefully defined. (Like most such groups, it would benefit from having a charter that clarifies its mission, objectives, scope/responsibilities, relationships and operating principles.) The following should be considered:

- While this group’s members may be champions for online education at McNeese, they should not be its *primary* champions. That role should be taken on by McNeese’s senior leadership.
- This group should have an advisory but not a decision-making role. Their role should be primarily to advise the dean/XEd and his/her staff and, where solicited, McNeese’s senior leadership. The dean/XEd and relevant staff members, having consulted others as they believe appropriate, should make and be held accountable for their own decisions. (Some decisions, of course, are more appropriately made at higher levels. In those cases, the decision makers should seek the dean/XEd’s recommendations.)
- If this group has responsibilities related to the online curriculum, again, they should be advisory. They should not operate as a curriculum committee for online education. (See **Approval Process for Online Programs** on p. 61 for related discussion.)

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Organization and Operations

- Whether members of this group are invited/appointed by the dean/XEd or the provost will depend on McNeese’s culture, but it should be made clear that it exists to help and advise the dean/XEd and his/her staff.

Administrative Operations Group

We understand that an Academic Advisory Council, which includes Dr. Daboval, the deans, the Faculty Senate president and others, meets regularly to discuss academic issues, but that no corresponding administrative group has been needed. We suggest that the implementation of this plan could necessitate the formation of such a group. It would consist of the heads of the administrative units that would support or otherwise be affected by the plan, i.e., the registrar, cashier/bursar, dean of enrollment management, director of financial aid, director of admissions and recruiting, etc. They would meet regularly to collaborate on ensuring that McNeese’s administrative policies and processes work—and work together—for students who will never set foot on campus.

Notes:

- At such time that the administrative processes that support online education become routine, this group may no longer need to meet.
- The AELAG has been involved from time to time in identifying administrative process issues impacting online education at McNeese. With the formation of an Administrative Operations Group, the AELAG can be relieved of such responsibilities, which can be put back in the hands of those who are in the best position to address them.

Approval Process for Online Programs

From a workability standpoint, it is very important that academic programs, once approved by McNeese’s Curriculum Committee, be considered approved for any medium. As noted on p. 33 under **Other Curricular Considerations**, McNeese should not undertake this plan unless it believes that its online programs will deliver equivalent or superior learning outcomes compared with onsite programs. That being the case, the key difference in putting a program online is the medium; its quality, contents and learning goals will remain consistent. There should therefore be no need for an additional approval process (i.e., no separate decisions by the Curriculum Committee are needed, nor is there a need for a separate online education curriculum committee). Instead, decisions regarding whether existing degrees will be delivered online should be

driven by the “extended education” function and informed by market research, with participation by McNeese’s partner and relevant players on campus.

Ensuring the Quality of Online Programs

Each subject matter expert will have the primary responsibility for ensuring the quality of the online program(s) s/he authors. However, additional quality assurance mechanisms should exist both within the departments and at a cross-functional oversight level:

- **Departmental Level:** Each department will be responsible for establishing its own internal review process, subject to any McNeese standards, to ensure that (1) the resulting online courses meet expectations for quality, (2) the courses appropriately link to and support one another, and (3) the end-product has faculty buy-in.
 - **Oversight Level:** Recurring issues raised by students or issues that cannot be resolved by faculty members, academic program directors or student retention specialists will be addressed behind the scenes by a program-specific Quality Assurance Team that will investigate the issues as needed, seek systemic solutions, and initiate corrective action. The team, which will be convened by the academic program director, may involve various others depending on the stage in the program’s life cycle and the nature of the issues. Members may include, for example, the director of online education, the instructional designer, the department chairperson, faculty members, the partner’s project manager and/or marketing manager, and the student retention specialist.
-

Agreements with Subject Matter Experts

The current arrangement with faculty members to develop online courses is informal, incentive compensation may be insufficient and current policies on intellectual property ownership do not address the development of online content. McNeese should formally commission its faculty member subject matter experts to develop online courses for the university and enter into contractual agreements to do so. Some of the topics that need to be addressed in those agreements are discussed below.

Incentive/Compensation

Under current McNeese policy, faculty members receive a \$1,000 incentive upon completion of the development of their first online course; no

incentive or compensation is provided for the development of subsequent courses. When developing any course for the online degree programs proposed in this plan, faculty members should be compensated at a rate appropriate to McNeese’s market. This amount remains to be determined, but will be substantially more than \$1,000. Faculty members should be expected to tweak their courses on an ongoing basis without further compensation. However, when courses subsequently require substantial revision/updating (which is often done every three or four years at other institutions), SMEs should be compensated for doing so. The rate for substantial updating or revision is often in the range of 40-65% of the compensation for developing a course and can be negotiated, depending on the extent of the revisions required.

Intellectual Property

McNeese should set a balanced intellectual property policy—i.e., one from which both the institution and the subject matter expert benefit. Three basic approaches that exist in the online education market are profiled in **Table 8**.

Table 8:
Three Approaches to Intellectual Property Ownership

Approach	Comments
The faculty member owns all intellectual property rights	This can be problematic insofar as it may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit the institution’s ability to have others teach the course • Leave the institution empty-handed if the faculty member leaves the institution or decides to stop teaching the course
The institution owns all intellectual property rights	This, too, can be problematic, since it provides a <i>disincentive</i> for faculty members to develop online courses.
The course as a whole belongs to the institution, but the faculty member retains the right to use its constituent parts	This is a win-win, ensuring that the institution gets what it has paid for and that the faculty member can use the content in his or her teaching. If the faculty member leaves, s/he can use the content in developing a similar course, but it will not be the same course.

As the **Comments** in **Table 8** imply, we believe that McNeese should adopt the third approach.

Use of External SMEs

Although we expect that McNeese will generally use its own faculty in developing its online courses, there is no reason why it cannot commission an external expert to act as an SME. This might make sense if, for example, McNeese did not have the resident expertise in a specific subject or, for whatever reason, existing faculty members did not come to an agreement with the university to develop the course. In such cases the academic program director would recruit any external SMEs through the networks of its dean, department heads and/or faculty members.

Agreements with Faculty to Teach Online Courses

Most McNeese faculty members are likely to teach online courses as part of their regular teaching loads. For them, no special agreements will be needed. McNeese should, however, have formal agreements with (1) its own faculty members for teaching online courses on an overload basis and (2) individuals retained to teach or facilitate online courses on an adjunct basis. Standard compensation amounts are often set for lead instructors and facilitators, are determined by market rates, and apply equally to the institution's own faculty and its adjuncts.

Academic Advising

See **Academic Advising** on p. 39.

Online Education's Role in the Reward Structure

To succeed, McNeese's online education programs must have faculty participation. Absent that participation, this plan is a nonstarter. The increased levels of compensation discussed under **Agreements with Subject Matter Experts** and **Agreements with Faculty to Teach Online Courses** above will help generate interest, but they may not be sufficient. A further, critical step, in ensuring success (as indicated in the second **Institutional Principle** listed on p. 26), would be for McNeese to ensure that the university's reward system fully considers faculty members' roles in developing and teaching online courses—i.e., on an equal footing with similar activities related to onsite programs—in annual performance reviews and merit level decisions. McNeese's inaction on this point could lead to the development of a “faculty caste system” in which online educators are relegated to a lower status, and its online programs could, as a result, be starved of faculty resources. With it, those online programs could thrive.

**Revenue
Sharing
Model**

Another step in ensuring the success of McNeese’s online programs is the implementation of an internal revenue-sharing model that creates further incentives for the institution, the academic units and the faculty members.⁹ According to this model, once administrative overhead and course expenses (e.g., SMEs and instructor compensation) have been paid for, McNeese’s share of online tuition revenues from any given program would be shared, on a basis to be explored and proposed by McNeese and agreed to by all relevant parties, by the university, the academic departments offering the program in question, and any other units that McNeese may decide to include. (In other words, net—not gross—revenues would be shared on a predetermined basis.)

The university would have the right to use its share as it deems appropriate, while the departments would be expected to use their share to hire additional faculty, and as discretionary funds to support research, send faculty members to conferences, etc. McNeese should take into account in arriving at a revenue-sharing model that (1) tuition revenues will be smaller in the beginning but will increase over time and (2) should become substantial once the programs mature. To ensure that the various parties have sufficient incentives throughout, then, it may be appropriate to consider a multi-stage model in which the revenue model is adjusted over time.

⁹ This suggestion is consistent with the spirit of AELAG’s suggestion of a revenue-sharing arrangement in its 2011 report, but the specific model that they cited, which is reportedly used by Oregon State University, may not optimally reflect McNeese’s circumstances and needs.

ACCREDITATION-RELATED REPORTING

Reporting Process

As we understand it, there are two steps involved in obtaining external approvals for McNeese to offer existing degree programs online:

- **Obtain Approval from the University of Louisiana System and the Louisiana Board of Regents:** The first step is to submit a short (three-page) *Request for Authority to Offer an Existing Academic Program through Distance Learning Technologies* to the ULS which, when approved, is then reviewed for approval by the Regents.
- **Inform SACS:** Once that authority has been granted, McNeese informs SACS of its intention to offer the program. (Since SACS has already approved McNeese to offer programs with 50% or more of their credits electronically delivered, McNeese is not expected submit a Substantive Change Report; rather, it is sufficient for McNeese to notify SACS in the future when additional online programs are to be launched.)

A more involved process would be called for, of course, if McNeese intended to offer a new program online (i.e., one not yet approved to be offered on campus), but that appears unlikely in the short term.

Is that Process Sufficient Here?

It is not clear to us based on material provided by SACS¹⁰ whether the process described above would suffice. If SACS considered the partnership called for in this plan to be a “substantive change,” then a more involved process might be required. However, we have found no specific indication in SACS’s *Substantive Change Policy Statement* that such a partnership would trigger the need for a Substantive Change Report. The change it implies, however, could certainly be interpreted as major, and therefore substantive. Two types of substantive changes could possibly be invoked in this case:

- “Any change in the established mission or objectives of the institution”
- “Entering into a collaborative academic arrangement such as a dual degree program or a joint degree program with another institution.”

¹⁰ E.g., *What is a substantive change and how should it be handled?*, <http://www.sacscoc.org/SubstantiveChange.asp>, and *Substantive Change for Accredited Institutions of the Commission of Colleges, Policy Statement*, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges, available at <http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/081705/Substantive%20change%20policy.pdf>.

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Accreditation-Related Reporting

Regarding the latter, the proposed plan does not call for a dual or joint degree, but those appear only to be examples. The partnership in question could certainly be considered “a collaborative academic arrangement.”

**Suggested
Course of
Action**

We have already discussed the possible accreditation implications of this plan with McNeese’s Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Academic Support, which oversees McNeese’s accreditation activities. In response, they have contacted the appropriate parties at SACS to explore the issue and seek their guidance.

ANALYSIS OF RISKS

About this Chapter

This chapter outlines the risks—both internal and external—that McNeese State faces in adopting and implementing the online education plan outlined above.





Notes:

- This chapter does not address broad risks to McNeese State’s wellbeing, such as natural or economic disasters.
- The assessment of risk it contains is based on Tom Clay & Associates, Inc.’s limited exposure to McNeese, and should be viewed accordingly.

Analysis of Risks

Risks to the success of the proposed online programs may originate either internally, i.e., within McNeese, or externally, i.e., outside the university. McNeese has an advantage in dealing with internal risk, since they are mainly within McNeese’s sphere of influence, where McNeese can take action to manage them. External risks, in contrast, are more of a “wild card,” since McNeese tends to have relatively little control over them.













Each risk is described briefly, the variables on which it depends are outlined, and assessments of (1) the level of the risk and (2) the probable impact if the risk is realized are represented using the following graphics, known as “Harvey balls”:

-  High
-  Medium-High
-  Medium-Low
-  Low










The external and internal risks that McNeese State faces are discussed and represented graphically in **Table 9** and **Table 10**, respectively. The assessments of risk assume that McNeese follows this plan.

Analysis of Risks








**Table 9:
External Risks**

		 High	 Medium-High	 Medium-Low	 Low
Risk	Key Variables/Comments			Risk	Impact
External					
The plan is not supported by oversight bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Our understanding is that the plan is not subject to the approval of the Board of Regents or the ULS, so these should not be a concern. ● A Substantive Change Report, if required, should prove sufficient for SACS approval; this observation is based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Approvals that regional accreditors have granted many other institutions for programs based on similar partnerships – The approvals for online programs that McNeese has already received from SACS 				
McNeese is unable to come to an agreement with a partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Scenarios in which this might take place include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Prospective partners are not interested – The two parties cannot agree to terms ● The first scenario seems unlikely based on McNeese’s strengths and characteristics (see p. 11). ● Nor is there particular reason to expect the second. Based on our experience in working with McNeese, we expect McNeese to be open, effective and reasonable negotiators. ● If McNeese were, however, unable to reach an agreement with a partner, it would preclude the successful completion of this plan. 				
McNeese negotiates a disadvantageous agreement with its partner	<p>We do not expect this, since:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What we have seen implies that McNeese’s financial operations are run very skillfully ● The more credible partner organizations are interested in achieving win-win situations, and are therefore unlikely to put McNeese in an untenable position <p>Ending up with a less-than-ideal agreement, however, would likely not be disastrous since, while not providing as much cash as the university would like during the term of the agreement, it would result in McNeese having the desired online programs and the capabilities required to run them, and their full revenues after the agreement had expired.</p>				
The partnership proves ineffective	<p>If McNeese and its partner did not work effectively together, it could impact nearly every aspect of the plan and, at a minimum, put strain on both sides as they worked out the relationship. This underscores the importance of partner selection and negotiation. McNeese needs to make sure that:</p>				





Analysis of Risks

 High	 Medium-High	 Medium-Low	 Low
Risk	Key Variables/Comments	Risk	Impact
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It selects a partner that shares McNeese’s values ● Its own culture and interests and those of its partners should be aligned ● The details of the partnership/agreement are carefully and thoroughly worked out, and expectations are shared before the agreement is signed <p>Positive indicators are that (1) all of this applies equally to McNeese’s partner and (2) a good agreement will provide incentives to resolve any tensions that might arise. Also, McNeese is experienced with partnerships and will bring a positive attitude into the partnership.</p>		
<p>McNeese’s partner ceases to operate (i.e., goes out of business) before the contract is completed</p>	<p>The risk appears to be very low as long as McNeese partners with established organization that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Is very financially sound, and/or ● Does not depend solely on that business for survival, i.e., is owned by another organization (1) that can support it financially as needed and (2) whose reputation would be damaged if it failed to deliver on commitments <p>Also, many of the players in this market are well established and therefore unlikely to go out of business, and the industry in which they operate is strong and growing.</p>		
<p>McNeese’s online programs do not generate expected enrollments</p>	<p>This could result from circumstances such as the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The wrong programs are selected ● The market research miscalculates demand ● Program marketing is ineffective ● Enrollment counseling is ineffective ● The demand for online graduate degrees plummets unexpectedly <p>McNeese’s best protection against the first four threats is to partner with a reputable organization with strong experience in building, marketing and delivering online programs. The last threat cannot be guarded against and is extremely unlikely.</p>		
<p>McNeese is prevented from setting tuition at needed levels</p>	<p>If McNeese does not have the freedom to set tuition rates for Louisiana residents, it could complicate revenue sharing arrangements and impact the financial attractiveness of the programs. There are a number of possible ways of addressing this issue. Leadership is aware of the challenge and is considering its options.</p> <p>In the event that McNeese was denied that freedom, it could impact McNeese’s partnering prospects, but the university’s leaders would know that before launching the online programs, and would have the opportunity to plan accordingly. There should therefore not be significant risk of launching programs that would fail through lack of pricing flexibility.</p>	<p>Unknown</p>	

Analysis of Risks

		 High	 Medium-High	 Medium-Low	 Low
Risk	Key Variables/Comments	Risk	Impact		
Higher-than-anticipated costs render the programs unprofitable	<p>Experienced partnering organizations will be familiar with the costs involved in building, launching and delivering online programs, so significant overruns are unlikely. Should they occur, they will impact the partner—not McNeese—almost exclusively.</p> <p>It will also be important for McNeese to work carefully with its partner to anticipate all internal costs implied by the responsibilities it assumes, and to make sure either that the partner agrees to cover them or that they are budgeted for.</p>				
McNeese’s relationship with Fort Polk does not proceed as envisioned	<p>Demand for McNeese’s programs at Fort Polk could strengthen revenues from the start. Several unknowns need to be explored, however:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The nature of the agreement and the likelihood of its being consummated ● How the subjects that Fort Polk is interested in align with what the market in general demands and therefore what McNeese’s partner is willing to fund <p>In any case, revenues from Fort Polk are “gravy,” and not central to this plan.</p>	Unknown			







**Table 10:
 Internal Risks**

Risk	Key Variables/Comments	Risk	Impact
Internal			
<p>Buy-in to the plan from the deans, departments, faculty and/or administrators is not achieved</p>	<p>There could be significant impacts if key players do not support the new model and decline to participate or participate in a non-supportive manner. Critical variables in achieving buy-in include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How the plan is communicated, leadership’s credibility, and how commitment is sought ● The extent to which needed assurances are given and attention is to paid to individuals’ concerns ● The extent to which the incentive/reward structure supports/encourages participation (i.e., all constituencies recognize the plan as a win-win) ● The presence of “champions” for the plan, i.e., key faculty members and other influential individuals on campus who endorse and actively support it <p>Factors that will help support buy-in include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The strength of the financial case and the program’s likely contribution to the university’s revenue base ● The additional benefits to the university and its various constituencies that successful online programs will bring <p>Comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Buy-in and active support at the leadership level will be critical, since the leaders will have the greatest ability—positive and negative—to impact the plan’s success. Failure at any other level could also have serious consequences. ● Given what we had heard about past reticence to embrace online courses, we were surprised at the level of acceptance/support voiced during our interviews—with university leadership, deans, faculty members and administrators. It appears to us that a strong plan will have greater support now than it might have had several years ago. 		
<p>A perceived clash of interests triggered by the coexistence of existing online courses and the proposed online programs creates tensions/divisions</p>	<p>In our view, this will be the most significant management challenge for McNeese’s leadership in implementing this plan. The risks are that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Faculty or staff members who are invested in McNeese’s current online education model could resist this plan and impede the success of the new model. ● The university- and market-driven culture fails to gain traction in the face of the current faculty-driven culture. <p>Those who resist might either decline to participate or participate in a non-supportive manner.</p>		







Analysis of Risks

Risk	Key Variables/Comments	Risk	Impact
	<p>This issue relates to how McNeese’s existing online courses are handled when the new plan is implemented. McNeese’s leadership must recognize that a significant number of faculty members, working with the Office for Electronic Learning, have put a great deal of time and effort into building and teaching online courses, and are heavily invested in their continued success. That success could appear to be threatened by this plan. It is important that they understand that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Significant benefits will accrue from this plan, and they, too, will benefit ● Their work and contributions to the development of McNeese as a player in online education are appreciated will not be in vain ● This new approach to online education will afford them opportunities to access additional support when McNeese has further built its online education capabilities <p>The danger here is that McNeese could inadvertently set up two parallel online education endeavors that relegate the “old approach” to second-class status and thereby divide the faculty and their perceived interests. This should be guarded against. Unfortunately, the reality is that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Many of the courses that have already been developed are in subjects or at levels where online programs are unlikely to be offered in the short term. So some faculty members may not be in a position to participate in the “new approach” for some time. (2) Any faculty members who have built courses that could be incorporated into online programs under the plan are likely to have to update them to conform to new McNeese standards. (However, since most existing online courses are at the undergraduate level and the plan calls mainly for graduate programs, the latter may rarely apply.) <p>Tensions could also inadvertently be triggered by any future effort by McNeese’s online education function to apply McNeese standards to the existing online courses. If at some point, for example, the online education function reviewed the existing online courses and recommended that they either be (1) left as they are, (2) updated or (3) retired, the second and third recommendations could be interpreted as a criticism. It is premature to indicate at this point the extent to which the online education function should exert authority in the future over the existing online courses, but it is safe to say that, if they do so to any great extent, they must tread wisely.</p>		







Analysis of Risks

Risk	Key Variables/Comments	Risk	Impact
<p>McNeese alienates its on-campus students who supplement their studies with online courses</p>	<p>If McNeese’s onsite students perceive that McNeese is ignoring their needs—e.g., not supporting the online courses already offered or not building more—dissatisfaction could result. The decision to focus resources on online programs is not entirely an “either-or” decision, and calls for McNeese to strike some balance between focusing on the new and supporting the old. Exactly how to do this will require thought and planning, and probably some experimentation and negotiation.</p>		
<p>McNeese is unable to commit the financial resources required to make this plan succeed</p>	<p>Fortunately, there are likely ways that McNeese could carry out this plan without committing a great deal of money, since partners will often pay nearly all costs directly related to new programs, in exchange for a substantial share of revenues. (As noted earlier, McNeese could probably retain a greater revenue share by committing funds—e.g., restricted revenues—to program development.)</p>		
<p>McNeese fails to staff the plan appropriately or sufficiently</p>	<p>Although new human resources could be paid for by McNeese’s partner, both new and existing personnel need to be applied to carrying out this plan:</p> <p>Existing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● McNeese’s leadership ● A significant investment of time by McNeese’s administrators ● Participation by faculty members to develop and teach classes <p>New:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● New leadership and staff positions in the “extended education” organization ● Qualified faculty program directors ● Sufficient qualified facilitators ● Additional administrative staff members <p>Particular risks related to staffing could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Putting too much emphasis on hiring from within if external hires are needed: For example, a key position will be the dean/XEd. It is critically important that McNeese find the right person to fill this role. Excellent candidates may exist internally. But if not, McNeese should resist selecting an internal candidate who is likely to be less effective than someone retained via a wider search. ● Excessively embracing a “lean spending/lean hiring philosophy” where a more liberal approach is called for: McNeese’s historical tendency toward lean spending has served it very well in the past. In some cases, however, it will be in McNeese’s best interests for the administration to act in a counter-cultural manner when it comes to spending. For example, this plan calls for McNeese to pay market rates for building and teaching the courses for the 		

Analysis of Risks

Risk	Key Variables/Comments	Risk	Impact
	<p>online programs. Because these market rates are significantly higher than McNeese currently pays, the administration may resist doing so. However, paying market rates could be the key to overcoming faculty members' reticence to endorse the plan.</p> <p>We do not foresee significant challenges in attracting academic program directors and facilitators, as long as McNeese is willing to seek them from outside the institution. (Other schools have been very successful in attracting such resources.) Attracting facilitators is made easier by the fact that they can be recruited nationally or even internationally.</p>		
<p>McNeese loses key employees who are working on or champions for the online programs</p>	<p>This is certainly possible and should be planned for. Losing key personnel could complicate or delay the plan, but no one is irreplaceable.</p>		
<p>The "extended education" organization or its operations prove ineffective</p>	<p>The keys to the success of McNeese's "extended education" function include the following, all of which are under McNeese's control:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sufficient/appropriate staffing ● Effective oversight from above and management from within ● Effective implementation of the plan, project planning and management, strategy setting, organization design, staffing and skill building ● Sufficient and appropriate space/facilities 		
<p>McNeese is unsuccessful in establishing administrative and support processes for online degree programs and students</p>	<p>The dangers are that (1) McNeese's administrative staff will not sufficiently anticipate the challenges that this plan implies for their functions, and/or will not plan sufficiently for them, and (2) that the activities related to preparing for/transitioning to this plan distract or overwork staff, impeding their effectiveness in conducting the rest of their responsibilities.</p> <p>To support these programs well will take resolve, time and attention. The initiation of an Administrative Operations Group (see p. 61) should contribute substantially to McNeese's success in this area, insofar as it will ensure appropriate communication and coordination.</p> <p>We rate this risk as fairly low because of the quality of the McNeese administration and its willingness to do whatever is required to ensure McNeese's success.</p>		

Analysis of Risks

Risk	Key Variables/Comments	Risk	Impact
<p>Management of the change is ineffective/support for the change by key players is lost over time</p>	<p>Effective change management is always a concern with significant initiatives. Although ineffective management of proposed changes could lead to problems, these variables are under McNeese’s control. McNeese needs to follow principles of effective change management, which include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ongoing communication ● Involving those who are affected ● Exercising patience in the face of short-term pressures ● Monitoring/listening and adjusting ● Acknowledging and fixing mistakes ● Driving change at a pace that can be successfully absorbed 		
<p>The online programs suffer from quality issues</p>	<p>While quality issues could have serious impacts on the program, it should not be a problem, as long as (1) McNeese selects a reputable partner and (2) McNeese’s academic program directors and subject matter experts do a credible job.</p>		
<p>The proposed programs attract students who would otherwise have attended McNeese as on-campus students</p>	<p>This is possible and even likely in cases in which students who already have a tie to McNeese would be better served by an online program than by an onsite program, but do not currently have that option. We consider the risk to both programs as fairly low, however, since most students who prefer a fully online program are likely already to have been drawn away from McNeese by the wide range of online programs readily available in the higher education marketplace. If McNeese’s onsite programs are going to lose such students, it is better that they lose them to McNeese’s online programs, rather than to a competitor’s.</p>		

HIGH-LEVEL IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

About this Chapter

This chapter summarizes a plan specifying the various actions to be taken to launch the proposed online education programs.

Keys to Success

Effectiveness in the key areas listed in **Table 11** will help ensure the success of the proposed online programs.

Table 11:
Keys to Success

Area	Specifics
Determination to Succeed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Do it right or not at all!” ● Focus on the goal: “There’s always a way ... find it!”
Support from Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Buy-in to and active, ongoing support for the plan (including the approach, timeline, model, etc.) from the president, the provost and others ● Active removal of obstacles ● Budgetary support where needed (and influence, if necessary)
Strategic Clarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Clarity by all players about what McNeese is doing, where this initiative is going, and why, and what is required to carry it out successfully
Effective Partnering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Effectiveness in all stages of partnering, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Search for and evaluation of prospective partners - Negotiation of partnership, division of responsibilities and defining boundaries - Communicating with the partner - Managing and coordinating partnering activities and acting swiftly to identify and resolve issues
Effective Internal Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reassurances for staff where needed ● Transparency/no “sugar coating”; ongoing and frequent communication regarding vision, plans, progress, challenges, etc. ● Soliciting staff’s opinions, listening carefully and taking inputs seriously

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Area	Specifics
Effective Project and Change Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Active and effective “project management” related to the creation and delivery of online programs ● Appointment of the right people to plan, lead and manage ● Building buy-in/ownership among staff by involving them, acknowledging their contributions and, when appropriate, acting on their advice ● Monitoring/measuring progress (including feedback mechanisms), and making adjustments
Effective Management and Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All relevant players at McNeese working together well, and focusing on future goals rather than “turf” or protecting the status quo ● Administrators carrying out their functional responsibilities effectively, enthusiastically and with an open mind ● Creating and/or maintaining an effective management culture ● Anticipating and preventing clashes of cultures or interests
Effective Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The right people in the right positions, including hiring new people when needed
Effective Rewards and Incentives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Creating and implementing an effective revenue-sharing system ● Paying appropriate incentives/compensation for participation ● Ensuring that McNeese’s reward system appropriately takes into account participation in McNeese’s online activities in annual performance reviews and merit level decisions
Appropriate Supporting Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sufficiently supporting current online offerings while building new ones
Effective Capability Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensuring that McNeese effectively leverages lessons that can be learned from observing its partner’s operations and results ● Effective training and cross-training
Creative Resolution of Challenges Cited Under Analysis of Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● E.g., arriving at a method of pricing McNeese’s online programs at an appropriate level in a way that conforms to all applicable standards and laws

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The Action Plan

The steps described in **Table 12** are organized into the following categories:

1. Evaluate this Plan; Adjust if Needed
2. Conduct Initial Detailed Planning
3. Further Test the Plan and Generate Commitment
4. Work Out Details of the “Extended Education” Organization and Appoint its Leader
5. Select a Partner
6. Conduct Further Detailed Planning with Partner
7. Adjust Internal Policies, Processes and Infrastructure to Support Online Programs
8. Select Programs to Be Co-developed
9. Obtain External Approvals, as Needed
10. Appoint Academic Program Directors
11. Fill Any Other Positions of Immediate Need
12. Launch Program Development and Other Activities with Partner

Table 12:
The Action Plan

What	How	Who
1. Evaluate this Plan; Adjust if Needed		
Determine who should participate in evaluating this plan	Dr. Daboval should review this plan as a whole and do so in detail, annotating it as she goes. Guided by the assumptions agreed to in the project proposal, she should then determine who else should review all or parts of the plan.	Lead: Dr. Daboval Participants: TBD
Conduct the review, compile the responses, and consider their implications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Distribute all or portions of the plan to reviewers ● Conduct the review and submit comments ● Compile and review the comments; determine whether there are substantive issues to be discussed with Tom Clay 	Lead: Dr. Daboval or designee Participants: TBD (see previous step)
If necessary, discuss possible changes with Tom Clay	Note: The purpose of the review is to identify and address major issues that could prevent this plan’s success.	Lead: Dr. Daboval Participants: Tom Clay

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What	How	Who
2. Conduct Initial Detailed Planning		
<p>Appoint one or more individuals to lead the detailed implementation planning process</p>	<p>Determine who has the needed planning and management skills and is available to conduct/lead this planning effort. (Experience with online education is less important than planning skills, since the planner will access specialized information from others.)</p>	<p>Lead: Dr. Daboval Participants: TBD</p>
<p>Formulate a detailed plan for all activities culminating with partner selection</p>	<p>Use project management skills and methods to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Break the macro steps of this plan into detailed steps and sub-steps ● Assign responsibilities and deadlines <p>Communicate the detailed implementation plan, as needed.</p>	<p>Lead: TBD Participants: TBD Note: Tom Clay & Associates, Inc. can be helpful in this step, if requested</p>
3. Further Test the Plan and Generate Commitment		
<p>Identify constituencies and their potential hotspots</p>	<p>Determine to which segments of the McNeese community the plan should be presented and whose commitment should be sought. Anticipate where the plan could threaten the various groups' interests and what objections they might raise; determine the appropriate responses to those objections.</p> <p>Note: As we understand it, the process of generating buy-in for the plan will be primarily internal; however, any oversight bodies that need to know about or weigh in on the plan should also be included.</p>	<p>Lead: Dr. Daboval or designee Participants: TBD</p>
<p>Decide how to present the gist of the plan</p>	<p>This plan document is unlikely to be the best form in which to present the plan, since it is quite long and detailed, and could either appear too complex or be intimidating. A simplified presentation based on the contents of this document, given by McNeese's leadership, might be more effective. McNeese's leadership would then have the option of making this document available to those who are interested in more detail.</p>	<p>Lead: Dr. Daboval or designee Participants: TBD</p>
<p>Present the plan, elicit input and reactions, answer questions and address concerns</p>	<p>This could be done in focus group sessions for smaller or more strategically critical audiences, and in a "town meeting" setting for other groups. Once McNeese has decided to pursue the plan, the focus should shift from whether to adopt the plan to (1) the choices it implies and (2) how it should be implemented.</p>	<p>Lead: Dr. Daboval or designee Participants: TBD</p>

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What	How	Who
4. Work Out Details of the “Extended Education” Organization and Appoint its Leader		
Recruit and appoint the dean/XEd	Using the process typically employed by McNeese in recruiting senior administrators, define the position, identify and evaluate candidates, and fill the position.	Lead: Dr. Daboval or designee Participants: TBD
Create the organization’s “charter”	The dean/XEd, who will oversee this function, should propose the method for completing this step, but the selected method should result in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A name for the unit ● A statement of its mission ● The definition of its scope/responsibilities ● A profile of its key relationships ● A set of operating principles ● An agreed-to organization chart 	Lead: Dean/XEd Participants: TBD
Implement the required organizational changes	The changes called for in the organization chart—titles, jobs and reporting relationships—should be implemented. Any related office moves that are called for immediately should be made; plans should also be made for any subsequent moves.	Lead: Dean/XEd Participants: Dr. Daboval, TBD
Adjust AELAG’s charter	Determine and make any changes required in the name, definition, role/purpose, reporting relationship or composition of the Alternative and Electronic Learning Advisory Group (AELAG).	Lead: Dr. Daboval Participants: Dean/XEd and AELAG members
Make any other needed changes	Based on the Initial Detailed Planning step shown above, determine and carry out other related steps.	Lead: Dean/XEd Participants: TBD
5. Select a Partner		
Plan the partner selection process	Based on the steps outlined in The Process of Selecting a Partner on p. 50, work out the details of McNeese’s partner selection process. Define roles and assign them to individuals.	Lead: Dean/XEd Participants: TBD
Implement the partner selection process	Follow the process worked out in the previous step.	Lead: Dean/XEd Participants: TBD
Negotiate and sign a partnership agreement		Lead: Dean/XEd Participants: Dr. Daboval, Mr. Meche, representative(s) of partner organization; others TBD

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What	How	Who
6. Conduct Further Detailed Planning with Partner		
With partner, conduct further detailed planning covering all partnership activities	The details of how this will be achieved will be determined in cooperation with the partner.	Lead: Dean/XEd Participants: Representative(s) of partner organization; others TBD
Based on what is learned in that planning process, plan any other internal details that come to light	McNeese will likely do this independently of its partner.	Lead: Dean/XEd Participants: TBD
7. Adjust Internal Policies, Processes and Infrastructure to Support Online Programs		
Identify, plan and carry out any such changes required	The dean/XEd will provide information on requirements. The changes implied by those requirements will then be clarified at the Administrative Operations Group level, and the details determined and carried out within the various support functions.	Lead: Dr. Daboval Participants: Dean/XEd and the senior administrators overseeing the support functions; others reporting to those senior administrators
8. Select Programs to Be Co-developed		
Select the programs to be developed	Using a process similar to the one described under Program Selection Process on p. 29, identify the programs to be developed.	Lead: Dean/XEd Participants: Dr. Daboval, representative(s) of partner organization, applicable McNeese deans and/or department heads; others TBD
9. Obtain External Approvals, as Needed		
Obtain external approvals, as needed	Guided by the section titled Accreditation-Related Reporting (see p. 66), obtain SACS approval, if necessary, for the partnership and/or the co-development of the selected programs.	Lead: Tom Dvorske, Director of McNeese’s Office of Institutional Effectiveness & Academic Support, and its SACS Liaison Participants: TBD
10. Appoint Academic Program Directors		
Appoint academic program directors	Using the process typically employed by McNeese in faculty recruiting, define the position; identify, evaluate and hire candidates; and fill each opening. These candidates may be existing faculty or come from outside of McNeese.	Lead: Individual department heads Participants: Others TBD, per McNeese’s faculty hiring process

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What	How	Who
11. Fill Any Other Positions of Immediate Need		
Identify the positions to be filled in the short term	Identify these positions based on (1) this plan, (2) discussions with the partner, (3) analysis by the heads of the various administrative functions, and (4) discussions in the Administrative Operations Group.	Lead: Dean/XEd Participants: Dr. Daboval, the Administrative Operations Group; others TBD
Implement the hiring process for administrative staff members	Using the process typically employed by McNeese in recruiting administrative staff, define the positions; identify, evaluate and hire candidates; and fill each opening. Candidates may be sourced internally or come from outside of McNeese.	Lead: Heads of the functions hiring the staff members Participants: Dean/XEd; others TBD per McNeese's hiring process
Recruit and hire subject matter experts to develop courses	This step would include defining the role, selection criteria and a hiring process, including finalizing a written agreement, and then carrying out that process.	Lead: Dean/XEd Participants: Heads of applicable departments; others TBD
12. Launch Program Development and Other Activities with Partner		
Launch program development and other activities with partner	After conducting a review to ensure that all preparations are in place, proceed with co-development and related steps.	Lead: Dean/XEd or designee Participants: Representative(s) of partner organization; others TBD

APPENDIX:

Participants in Information Gathering Meetings

The 19 individuals whom Tom Clay & Associates, Inc. interviewed are listed in **Table 13**. Within categories they are ordered alphabetically by last name.

Table 13:
Participants in Information Gathering Meetings

Name	Title and Affiliation
Administration	
Dr. Jeanne Daboval	Provost and Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs
Debbie Johnson-Houston	Director of the Lether E. Frazar Memorial Library
Virginia (Ginny) Karg	Director of University Marketing and Licensing
Eddie Meche	Vice President of Business Affairs
Dr. Toby Osburn	Associate Vice President, Enrollment Management & Student Affairs and Acting Dean of Student Services
Stephanie Tarver	Dean of Enrollment Management
Chad Thibodeaux	Chief Information Technology Officer
Dr. Helen Ware	Director of Electronic Learning and CALL
Academic Deans	
Dr. Wayne Fetter	Dean of the College of Education
Dr. Nikos Kiritsis	Dean of the College of Engineering and Engineering Technology
Dr. George Mead	Dean of the College of Science and Acting Dean of the William J. Doré School of Graduate Studies
Dr. Ray Miles	Dean of the College of Liberal Arts
Dr. Banamber Mishra	Interim Dean of the College of Business
Dr. Peggy Wolfe	Dean of the College of Nursing
Faculty	
Darren Alcock	Assistant Professor of Mathematics & Computer Science
Dr. Allison Gibbons	Assistant Professor of Family and Child Studies
Dr. Dustin Hebert	Assistant Professor of Education
Dr. Linda Larson	Associate Professor of Educational Leadership and Instructional Technology; President of the Faculty Senate
Dorothy Ortego	Assistant Professor of Engineering Technology and Department Head