

**SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE REPORT
UPDATE**

JUNE, 2001

**SUBMITTED TO
THE COMMISSION ON COLLEGES
SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS**

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**UPDATE OF THE SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE REPORT
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to provide an update to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) regarding the substantive change report submitted in 1995, and the updated substantive change report submitted in 1999. Those reports followed the *SACS Substantive Change Procedure C: The Initiation of Distance Learning Activities*. This document will follow *Appendix B: The Substantive Change Prospectus* from the December, 1999, *General Substantive Change Policy for Accredited Institutions of the Commission on Colleges*, and will follow *Procedure Two: Substantive Changes Requiring only Notification Prior to Implementation*. This notification of change is due to the intent to offer 50% or more of a degree program via distance learning/technology-based instruction. The academic programs involved are not significantly different from previously reported programs offered through distance learning.

ABSTRACT

The Troy State University School of Nursing offers a number of undergraduate and graduate distance learning courses through live interactive delivery and online interactive delivery. It is the intent of the school to develop additional distance learning courses through these two methods and a combination of the two, primarily in the RN to BSN/MSN and MSN degree programs and in the Nurse Practitioner certificate program, and to work toward incorporating a mix of the two formats in additional undergraduate courses in the ASN and BSN degree programs. The target audience for these courses is all students enrolled in the School of Nursing, and the initiative is anticipated to be ongoing.

Live interactive courses are delivered to students at the Montgomery, Phenix City, and Troy sites of the Troy State University System, via the system's microwave network. A fourth receive site in Dothan is operational but currently is not used for the delivery of nursing courses. Live interactive classes use multimedia technology in each site's electronic classrooms, with an instructor teaching classes from the host classroom while students in distance classrooms see and talk with the instructor and other students at all class sites. Two-way audio and two-way video microwave transmission permit open, synchronous communication throughout the class sessions, resulting in live interactive classes mirroring the traditional classroom setting. Traditional courses imply that the teacher and the students are together synchronously in an onsite classroom. Online interactive courses, primarily asynchronous, use the Internet for Web-based instruction and communication with and among students. These Web-based courses are available to students at home, work, or other location where computers are accessible. Web-enhanced courses incorporate a mix of live-interactive classes or traditional classes with Web-based modules; the features of live interaction and online interaction apply.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In 1995, the Troy State University School of Nursing, which is based on the university's main campus, began offering courses using microwave distance learning technology between the Troy and Dothan campus sites and between the Montgomery and Phenix City campus sites. Previously, courses had been taught at these sites using traditional teaching methods. Faculty were assigned either to a specific campus or they drove from the campus of their primary teaching responsibility to the outreach campus to teach courses. The university encouraged the School of Nursing to adopt live interactive distance learning for its degree programs extended to outreach campus sites, a move compatible with the Department of Radio and Television's communication options through the Troy State University System's microwave network expansion. Since that time, the network's capabilities have grown to allow the Montgomery, Phenix City, and Troy sites to be linked simultaneously; nursing courses are no longer extended to Dothan. The School of Nursing agreed that such a move would be financially advantageous as well as beneficial to students by exposure to the instructional diversity inherent within the full School of Nursing; students reacted positively to this educational opportunity. Furthermore, the implementation of distance learning in nursing education was, and continues to be, congruent with the institution's stated purpose of providing undergraduate and graduate education, especially for mature students, not only by traditional means of delivery but also by technological means (see Appendix E).

As reported in the 1999 substantive change update, the School of Nursing entered into an agreement with Jacksonville State University to teach four core master's level nursing courses in an online interactive format delivered via the Internet (see Appendix U). This move was requested by the Alabama Commission on Higher Education and approved by the Alabama Board of Nursing. Working with the TSU Distance Learning Center (DLC), faculty developed courses according to guidelines established for insuring quality in online distance delivery (see Appendix O). Courses under the umbrella of this contract are under the administrative control of the School of Nursing; instructors are full-time faculty of the School of Nursing.

ASSESSMENT OF NEED AND PROGRAM PLANNING / APPROVAL

As explained in the original document and the 1999 update, it was believed that using distance learning technology would reduce operating expenses and allow greater diversity in the educational experience. Also noted were the results of a student survey that indicated that students were amenable to the use of distance learning for course delivery. Furthermore, the Alabama Commission of Higher Education asked Troy State University to engage in a contractual agreement with Jacksonville State University (JSU) in Jacksonville, AL, in offering a master's degree in Community Health Nursing via the Internet. As students have become more skilled in using computers and the Internet, and have grown more technology dependent for information and communication, requests for distance learning options, particularly courses offered through the Internet, have increased.

Additionally, the School of Nursing Philosophy and the Organizing Framework, which were revised by the faculty in 2001, reflect the school's commitment to a learning environment supported by emerging technologies, with a specific focus on interactive communication and collaboration (see Appendix F). The School of Nursing's Technology Plan is included in this report as Appendix H.

DESCRIPTION OF THE CHANGE

The increase in the number of nursing courses delivered through live interactive, online interactive, and a combination of the formats requires no change in program outcomes and course objectives from those already established. The schedule of course offerings for the 2001-2002 academic year is shown in Appendix K; course overviews with objectives will be available for review by the SACS team. Complete program information from the TSU catalogs is presented in Appendix G. There are no differences in admission, curriculum, or graduation requirements for students enrolled in these courses, and no special arrangements are required for grading, transcripts, or transfer policies from those that currently exist. Administrative oversight to ensure program quality and to ensure the quality of services offered is through the established organization of the School of Nursing of the College of Health and Human Services, Troy State University, and the Distance Learning Center (see Appendices A through D).

FACULTY

A roster of faculty preparing to teach in the distance learning environment during the 2001-2002 academic year is provided in Appendix L. School of Nursing faculty are assigned to teach distance learning courses as part of their regular course loads; adequate faculty are available to deliver instruction. No adverse impact of the change is expected to impact faculty workload (see Appendix M for Faculty Workload from the *Faculty Handbook*).

LIBRARY AND LEARNING RESOURCES

Library resources are adequate to support students through the Troy State University Libraries' remote services. Online journal databases and interlibrary loan services are available to all enrolled students from any location with Internet access. An overview of library resources is included in Appendix N.

Resources provided online for students include library remote services help and tutorials for communication and technical skills important in the distance learning environment (i.e., email and email attachments, participation in discussion boards, and downloading programs). The School of Nursing provides additional support through two faculty members with expertise in instructional technology and who are available to assist students personally, either through email or face-to-face. Students are steered to library and learning resources from the School of Nursing World Wide Web site (<http://spectrum.troyst.edu/~nursing>).

PHYSICAL RESOURCES

The university provides support for distance learning initiatives through the system's microwave and computer networks; Spectrum, the TSU academic server; Prism, the TSU student server; Trojan Media Services and Management Information Services; computer labs at each site; and the Distance Learning Center.

The TSU Department of Radio and Television maintains electronic classrooms at each of the sites where live interactive classes are hosted and received. These classrooms are equipped with multiple cameras, microphones, video recording/playing capability,

and computers with Internet access, CD-ROMS, and PowerPoint software. Management Information Services (MIS) oversees the computer networking of the Troy campus; computer services at TSUM and TSUPC oversee their respective computer operations, including technical support. Trojan Media Services provides email service for all nursing faculty regardless of site (Troy, Montgomery, PC), and registered students can obtain email accounts at no charge from TMS, also regardless of site. These electronic resources are considered Troy State University System properties, thus ensuring smooth integration of services among all sites. Because these resources are adequate and are in current use, there will be no impact of the nursing distance learning initiative on these existing programs and services.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Live interactive and online interactive distance learning courses continue to be supported through tuition and state funds. The university has committed significant resources to the development and maintenance of distance learning courses and programs. The budgets for the Vice President of Technology and the Distance Learning Center will be available for review by the SACS team.

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

All courses, regardless of delivery method, are evaluated according to the Troy State University School of Nursing Evaluation Plan. Appendix J includes Section VI: Educational Effectiveness of this plan, which incorporates the Troy State University plan for course and instructor evaluation. A collection of distance learning research reports indicates no significant differences in data from courses offered via distance learning and traditional courses, including student achievement ([http:// nova.teleeducation.nb.ca/nosignificantdifference/](http://nova.teleeducation.nb.ca/nosignificantdifference/)). Course content and objectives for nursing courses do not differ according to the medium used for delivery, and student achievement is measured according to the same standard as for traditional courses.

Distance learning courses delivered through live interactive technology are evaluated by the Distance Learning Center according to the DLC evaluation plan (Appendix Q). Results are sent to the instructors, the Director of the School of Nursing,

and the Dean of the College of Health and Human Services. Beginning summer semester of 2001, the Technology Committee of the School of Nursing will evaluate the distance learning environment for live interactive, online courses, and Web-enhanced courses each semester (Appendices R, S, T), in addition to the evaluations specified in the Troy State University School of Nursing Evaluation Plan. Results will be distributed to instructors, program directors, the Director of the School of Nursing, the Dean of the College of Health and Human Services, and, in the case of live interactive courses, to the Director of the Department of Radio and Television.

All program evaluation is guided by the Troy State University Institutional Effectiveness Plan, which is based on the Six Points of Institutional Effectiveness (SPIE). Each year, programs within the School of Nursing complete an annual plan that is approved by the various levels of supervisory administration to the Dean's level, and then forwarded to the Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Effectiveness (OIRPE) for review and approval. The most recent SPIE documents for the School of Nursing are included as Appendix I; these plans specify program objectives, expected results, assessment instruments, administration of instruments, and reporting results which includes analysis of the results, comparison with actual with expected results, identification of strengths and weaknesses, formulating plans for improvement, and implementing these plans.

The quality of distance learning courses is guided by principles established by the Distance Learning Center, which provides criteria for course development (Appendix O) and an instructor orientation for faculty involved in distance learning initiatives that involve the Internet for content delivery (Appendix O). Furthermore, faculty teaching live interactive classes through the electronic classroom facilities are provided initial training and ongoing assistance as needed by the Distance Learning Center.