

# THE SLOAN SEMESTER

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## ABSTRACT

This paper is basically the “story” of the Sloan Semester. It is written in a journalistic/case-study style.

## KEYWORDS

Sloan Semester, Hurricane Katrina

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Sloan Semester was a vibrant and vitally important undertaking that required the immediate attention of a group of dedicated educators. The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, through its sponsorship of the Sloan Consortium (Sloan-C), financed this worthwhile initiative that helped Hurricane Katrina- and Rita-affected higher education students continue with their education in an online modality, as their institutions were forced to temporarily close down for the Fall 2005 semester. A chain of educated decisions, along with the appropriate infrastructure and team of professionals, successfully moved this initiative forward in a quick and unprecedented time frame, “on the fly.”

## II. HOW THE SLOAN SEMESTER STARTED

### A. An Unexpected Disaster

The impetus for the Sloan Semester began on Wednesday, August 31, 2005, immediately after Burks Oakley opened up the early morning online version of the *New York Times* from his home computer. Oakley had been following the news about Hurricane Katrina. He knew that two days earlier, on the 29<sup>th</sup>, the category 4 to 5 hurricane had made landfall. On the morning of the 31<sup>st</sup>, Oakley, like the rest of the nation, was shocked to find out that 75% of the city of New Orleans had already flooded, due to levee breaches [1]. He immediately sent an email to his colleague Ray Schroeder. “This is it, Ray,” he wrote. “We thought it would be the bird flu (referring to an emergency online education plan they had discussed in the recent past), but it turned out to be a hurricane. We have to do something. We need to have a national response to help the students in Louisiana.”

At his regular day job, Oakley is Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs for the University of Illinois, comprised of the Chicago, Springfield and Urbana-Champaign campuses. He is also on the Board of Directors for Sloan-C. Schroeder is Director of the Office of Technology-Enhanced Learning at the University of Illinois at Springfield, and he is also an active member of Sloan-C. Oakley and Schroeder were suddenly thrown into the construction of the Sloan Semester to help hurricane-affected students continue on with their higher education.

### B. Earlier Precedents for Emergency Business Continuation Plans

About one year prior to the hurricane, Schroeder developed a business continuation emergency plan at the

Springfield campus to deliver online courses in the event of a disaster. Schroeder referred to the possibility of an avian bird flu pandemic, or an Illinois tornado, closing down University of Illinois institutions indefinitely. He also noted that his emergency plan was not without precedent. For example, in 2003, the University of Hong Kong, a traditional face-to-face university, had to shift quickly to distance learning solutions to keep its university community alive when the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic closed it down [2].

In addition to the Springfield campus business continuation emergency plan, Schroeder put together a pre-proposal in July 2005 for a possible Sloan-C-sponsored workshop on emergency distance education, titled “Emergency ALN (Asynchronous Learning Networks): Delivering the Curriculum When the Campus Is Closed; Pre-Proposal for a National Workshop” [Appendix A]. In this pre-proposal, Schroeder wrote:

Precious little planning seems to have been put into the continuation of teaching and learning in higher education if physical campuses must be closed for a period of more than a week or two. Certainly such cases are not without precedent; earthquakes, hurricanes, and wars have taken their toll on universities over the centuries. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century we have come to learn all too well that no country, no institution is impervious to terrorism. Several campuses were seriously affected by the World Trade Center destruction. Buildings, air quality and access were all issues that impacted NYU and PACE, among others. But, perhaps it is the looming potential of bio-terrorism and even the apparently naturally-evolved avian flu that poses the most ominous near-term threat to U.S. colleges and universities... We are motivated to share our experiences in developing an emergency curriculum delivery plan based on ALN technologies as a way of sharing with others what we have learned. This is a critical need that is time sensitive.

### **III. BUILDING A TEAM AND GETTING FUNDED**

Little did Schroeder know at that time that his ideas would be shared in less than two months for the hurricane-impacted Gulf Coast region. In short, Oakley’s communication on August 31 was the first step for enlisting Schroeder as a member of a rapidly forming Sloan Semester Steering Committee that was formed by Sloan-C President Frank Mayadas and chaired by Oakley. Over the next few days, other educators were enlisted into the committee, including:

#### **Co-chair with Oakley**

John Bourne, Sloan-C Executive Director; Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering at Olin College, Professor of Technology Entrepreneurship at Babson College.

#### **Co-members with Schroeder:**

Frank Mayadas, Sloan-C, President; Sloan Foundation, Program Director

Bruce Chaloux, Sloan-C Board of Directors; Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), Director of the Electronic Campus

#### **Staff:**

Mary Larson, Southern Regional Education Board, Associate Director of the Electronic Campus

Janet Moore, Sloan-C, Chief Learning Officer

Martine Dawant, Sloan-C, Director of Technical Operations

Jeff Seaman, Sloan-C, Chief Information Officer and Survey Director

Keith Bourne, Sloan-C, Chief Operations Officer

Patti Giglio, PSG Communications

By 6:30 a.m. on August 31, Oakley was in his office in Urbana, Illinois, engaging in electronic and telephone communications with Sloan Foundation Program Director Frank Mayadas, Sloan-C Director John Bourne, SREB Electronic Campus Director Bruce Chaloux and Schroeder. This was the genesis of a much larger team of dedicated people put together to build the Sloan Semester “on the fly.” The team was dispersed, working out of Georgia, Maryland, Massachusetts, Illinois, Tennessee, New York, and elsewhere across the country. They communicated with each other primarily by email, inside listservs, and through teleconferences and web conferences. They also posted information to share with each other on web pages they created in short order.

Before anything officially moved forward, funding had to be obtained through the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. Mayadas contacted Sloan Foundation President Ralph Gomory, who took the necessary first steps to secure funding for the Sloan Semester. Mayadas also asked Oakley to draft an emergency ALN proposal, as soon as feasibly possible, which he would present to the Foundation’s Executive Committee immediately. Oakley, Schroeder, Bourne and Chaloux jointly drafted this proposal and submitted it to Mayadas by noon on August 31 [Appendix B].

It was suggested that \$1 million be allocated. The proposal featured a succinct outline covering how Sloan-C, in partnership with SREB, would launch a Sloan Semester to help hurricane-impacted students remain in the educational pipeline by offering them the opportunity to take free, accelerated, fully online courses slated to start by October 10, or later, and end no later than January 6, 2006. In short:

- SREB and Sloan-C would coordinate with impacted institutions to create a list of most critically needed courses.
- Sloan-C would solicit institutions from its membership to offer these accelerated online courses.
- An online catalogue, with a search engine, listing these courses, would be created by SREB and published through a link on the Sloan-C website.
- SREB would utilize its Visiting Electronic Student Authorization (VESA) system to streamline the admissions and registration processes.

The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation would subsidize the cost of offering these courses in the form of a \$2,500 per 3-credit or equivalent section grant to each providing institution. (The structure of this per section grant was changed to \$500 for one or two Sloan Semester student enrollments per section, \$1,000 for three to five Sloan Semester student enrollments per section, \$1,500 for six to 10 Sloan Semester student enrollments per section, and \$2,500 for 11 or more Sloan Semester student enrollments per section.)

It was estimated that 400 course sections would be offered with approximately 25 students enrolled in each section for a total of 10,000 enrollments.

The proposal was created quickly to meet the immediate needs and concerns of students who were suddenly thrust into a situation where they could not take the courses they had already registered and paid for at their home institutions. Enrolling in these courses was categorized as a bridge. “The important thing that we emphasized was that this was a bridge to get students from here back to their home institutions in January,” says Oakley. “It was not designed to steal students. They were not being fully matriculated someplace else. They were given guest/visitor access to take courses. This was something we put together to keep students in the pipeline during the Fall so they could still earn some credits.”

It was also noted that new layers of detail would inevitably surface as the initiative progressed, which

turned out to be an accurate prediction. Many new details and challenges, which are outlined throughout this report, did, in fact, happen during the development and pre launch, at mid-stream, and during the post stages of the Sloan Semester.

“Within 48 hours we had approval from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation executive committee to go ahead with the proposal,” says Oakley. The amount allocated ended up being \$1.1 million.

#### **IV. CONSTRUCTING A NATIONAL ONLINE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM**

In the meantime, staff from Sloan-C and SREB were already working full time on the building blocks needed to get the Sloan Semester organized. As early as Thursday morning, September 1, Sloan-C CIO Jeff Seaman had registered the sloansemester.org domain name, and Oakley had sent out a note to the Sloan-C listerv seeking interest from possible provider institutions. “We propose to offer online courses during a Sloan Semester, which would be an eight-week term starting on October 10,” Oakley wrote. “The purpose of this note is to gauge the level of interest in this proposed initiative.”

About 30 minutes later, Frank Mayadas responded to Oakley’s listerv post, writing that “We at Sloan have a fast approval process which we will exercise with respect to the project Burks described, and this process will produce a final decision mid-week next week. I should say that all signs are that a favorable decision will come about.”

Members of the steering committee continued to hold conference calls over the Labor Day weekend. Consequently, Oakley missed his pre-scheduled Labor Day golf outing.

##### **A. Establishing Policies and Developing Online Mechanisms**

Chaloux started to draft the policies and ground rules for the providing institutions to participate. “We basically took the SREB Electronic Campus model that we had a lot of experience with, doctored it up a bit, and then went out to the institutions,” Chaloux says.

One of the biggest challenges was to get a catalog of available online courses organized and posted on the special sloansemester.org website that Seaman had already started to craft. The SREB Electronic Campus infrastructure was the perfect fit for the catalog-building role. In addition, SREB had strong connections with hurricane-impacted state leaders along the Gulf Coast and with high-level academic administrators at the institutions that were forced into closing down.

As noted on its website at [www.electroniccampus.org](http://www.electroniccampus.org):

SREB’s Electronic Campus was launched in January 1998 as an electronic marketplace of online courses and programs from the South’s colleges and universities . . . It is a gateway to e-learning opportunities and online services designed to meet the unique needs of adult learners wishing to start, continue, or complete their education. It provides a simpler, friendlier one-stop place for adults to learn about and understand educational opportunities, to select campuses and/or e-learning opportunities that best match their needs, and to apply online and enroll in courses or programs. In addition, the Electronic Campus is an online resource for traditional-aged students with links to planning for, exploring, and applying online to hundreds of colleges and universities.

The SREB “electronic marketplace” model became the online backbone for students to find and register for a wide variety of accelerated courses that interested them. The model entailed building a searchable directory of available fully online, regionally accredited courses along with an easy and streamlined online registration and admissions process. In that spirit, SREB’s relationship with Xap Corporation helped to create a rapid online admissions and registrations system called the Visiting Electronic Student Authorization (VESA).

Xap Corporation, which provided the VESA service at no charge for the Sloan Semester, is an electronic and Internet-based information management systems provider for college-bound students. An already established SREB partner, Xap provides the back-end technology for managing the SREB Electronic Campus.

## **B. Who is Doing What?**

With all this in place, the Steering Committee, in only a few days, and under the guidance of Chaloux and Oakley, drafted all of the rules and responsibilities for provider institutions, students, Sloan-C and SREB [Appendix C]. A condensed version of these rules and responsibilities is listed below:

### **1. Provider Institutions:**

- Must be regionally accredited and be or become members of Sloan-C.
- Must offer course that carry regular academic credit and are recognized as degree credit.
- Sloan Semester students will not be charged tuition or fees, with the exception of required textbooks and course materials.
- Students will be cleared to register as “guest matriculant” or “transient student.”
- SREB’s VESA application form will establish student authorization to register for courses.\*
- Must provide a convenient and easy process for the students to officially register for courses.
- Must agree to forward an official transcript to the student’s home institution following submission of grades by faculty at no cost to the student.
- Must submit course information through SREB’s “back office” procedures.
- May enroll native students or others not from impacted institutions in Sloan Semester courses and must apply regular admission, tuition and fees, etc for these non-impacted students.
- Must make available, without cost, all regular online resources and services to Sloan Semester students.
- Must establish an information page and link to it for Sloan Semester students to facilitate registration process.
- Must forward to Sloan-C confirmation of student registration and course completion dates.

### **2. Students:**

- Must be matriculated for the Fall term at institutions in Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi designated by those states as impacted institutions.
- May enroll in up to 12 credit hours and may take courses from multiple institutions.
- Are required to meet prerequisites of providing institutions.

### **3. Sloan-C:**

- Will establish procedures for the review and approval of institutions and courses to be offered and authorize which courses will be listed in the Sloan Semester catalog.
- Will process payments to providing institutions.

#### **4. SREB:**

- Will host all courses on the Electronic Campus in a special section to be developed for the Sloan Semester. Students will be able to access the site from the Sloan Semester Site, an Electronic Campus site, and from providing institutions. (The actual SREB-manufactured catalog and registration system took time to build and did not go live until September 15.)
- Will determine, with state leadership in Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi, what institutions should be designated as impacted.
- Will establish a procedure for verifying student eligibility.
- Will provide its back office to approved providing institutions.
- Will collect student information using VESA and will forward this information electronically or by fax to providing institutions along with the courses the students have indicated an interest in enrolling in.

#### **5. How the Sloan Semester Will Work:**

- Student will access a Sloan-C-hosted Sloan Semester website for information.
- Student will click on “Review Available Courses” and be transferred to the Sloan Semester Electronic Campus website where they will establish an account and be able to locate courses.
- Student will complete VESA form, which includes their desired courses, and click on a submit button. SREB will be automatically notified of this submission, and a confirmation receipt will be automatically sent to student.
- SREB will verify VESA is complete and confirm that student is matriculated at impacted institution and forward VESA information to providing institution.
- Providing institution will establish the necessary student record from the VESA and then contact student about its registration and enrollment processes.
- Providing institution will forward confirmation of registration to Sloan-C.

### **C. Publishing a Website and Getting the Word Out In One Weekend**

In the meantime, as noted by Sloan-C Chief Operations Officer Keith Bourne, who was an important leading team member during this initial start-up phase, “timing was critical. We needed a fairly robust website set up before the weekend ended.” Seaman, along with Director of Technical Operations Martine Dawant and Keith got to work on Friday, September 2 and spent the entire Labor Day weekend collecting information and developing the sloansemester.org website. By the evening of Sunday, September 4, “after three 20-hour days and lots of coffee,” says Keith, “we had the majority of the website information posted and were already taking student sign-ups.”

At this point in time, the Sloan-C and SREB staffers were also constructing the necessary virtual infrastructure for communications between students, parents, provider institutions and the newly formed Sloan Semester volunteer staff.

Seaman, Dawant and Keith had their work cut out for them. Seaman explains how he began building a

website using the same design, structure and code of the Sloan-C site under a makeshift domain name until the Sloansemester.org domain was officially registered and operational (within 48 hours). “It was far faster to re-purpose existing infrastructure than to build something new,” he says. “We just imported the same identical code over from the Sloan-C website and changed the content. Martine (Dawant) and I were able to build forms in a matter of days because we just re-purposed existing code as best as we could and as quickly as we could.”

## **D. Forms, Databases and Listservs Help Drive Early Processes**

Two very important online forms that went live on the new Sloan Semester website as early as September 4 were a student interest form and a provider interest form. “The objective was twofold,” Seaman explains. “One was let’s recruit providers and find out what they can provide and then organize some mechanism by which we can collect their contact and course offering information. Second was to find the impacted students. We had to start collecting their contact information and course requests so that we could start playing the matchmaker function.”

The student interest form became the first contact point with impacted students. It was a basic form that asked for the student’s name, institution, grade level, contact information (including two email addresses), and the courses they might be interested in taking. Additionally, Seaman built a special private website for providers that listed FAQs and tallies of student interest requests. Listservs were also started for the Sloan Semester staff and for potential providers. Later an academic advisors website and listserv were added to the mix. Seaman also built backend databases that aggregated the data generated from the student and provider forms to show the Sloan Semester Committee, as well as the providers, where the students were coming from, what courses they were seeking, and what the volunteer provider institutions could offer.

Oakley and Chaloux were sending Seaman and Keith content about policies and messages that needed to be conveyed to providers and students, which they edited and posted accordingly. Oakley’s September 1 post to the Sloan-C listserv seeking provider institutions was already getting a significant response. By Saturday, September 3, more than 60 possible provider institutions had already expressed interest. By September 4, prior to even announcing that the Sloan Semester website was up and running, three prospective students had somehow found the site and submitted their student interest forms.

## **V. COMMUNICATIONS AND PROMOTIONAL PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION**

In addition to editing all the content being published on the Sloan Semester website, Keith started the grassroots development of a public relations program to get the word out to the affected student population. Sloan-C also enlisted professional media relations strategist Patti Giglio to help with this effort. Giglio is principal of PSG Communications, LLC, a firm out of Silver Springs, Maryland that provides public relations services for the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

“Because the student population from the affected areas was greatly dispersed and may not have access to TV, newspapers or even the Internet, the marketing of the Sloan Semester website was a real challenge,” Keith says. Late into Sunday night and during the next week, he started to get the word out about the Sloan Semester, using viral email campaign strategies; posting to web messaging boards where students might be looking for information; sending messages to students who were already signing up through the Sloan Semester website, encouraging them to contact their classmates; and mass emailing messages out to

Sloan-C's 20,000 individual members, as well as to a list of 7,000 higher education presidents and provosts.

On September 5, the first of many newspaper articles about the Sloan Semester appeared in the Springfield State Journal-Register, headlined "UIS to Offer Courses for Displaced Students." It was noted in the article lead that "in seven hours last Wednesday, Springfield's Ray Schroeder helped conceive a nationwide initiative that could salvage the semester for thousands of college students in the Hurricane Katrina-ravaged Gulf Coast. . ."

Giglio went to work on a number of very important fronts to spread the word much further and wider. She describes her role as developing and implementing

a strategic communications campaign designed to reach displaced students and their parents with messages about the opportunity being presented by Sloan Semester. The process included identifying target audiences, informal focus group research, developing key messages, training spokespeople, leveraging the PR influence of providing institutions, developing collaborative relationships and outreach efforts aligned with organizations, developing partnerships with other interested parties, and media tracking. Outreach tools and communications vehicles includes press releases; a 20+ market radio tour; personal and proactive media outreach to a targeted higher education audience, regionally-based reporters and general-assignment reporters; Internet-based based public service announcements (banner ads); and print advertising.

## **A. What Worked**

Some of the most successful promotional efforts were accomplished through the hurricane-impacted institutions that announced the Sloan Semester to their students and provided a link to the Sloan Semester website on the front pages of their own websites or through their departmental or faculty listservs.

An extensive press release campaign and radio tour also contributed significantly to spreading the word about the Sloan Semester to the right audience. Additionally, a collaboration with the Ad Council ultimately generated the distribution of numerous public-service banner advertisements posted on its affiliated websites that drove traffic up on the Sloan Semester website. Another banner ad placed on the MTV website also worked very well.

Giglio's first press release, announcing the launch of the Sloan Semester, came out as early as September 2. The lead-in was:

The Sloan Consortium, an international association of colleges and universities committed to quality online education, is offering students displaced by Hurricane Katrina an opportunity to continue their education at no cost. In collaboration with the Southern Regional Education Board and with funding from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, the special accelerated program will provide a wide range of courses to serve the learning needs of students at the community college, university and graduate level, regardless of academic discipline. These courses will be given by major universities and other Sloan Consortium members. Students interested in finding out more about the program and the free courses can do so at [www.SloanSemester.org](http://www.SloanSemester.org).

Giglio also organized radio interviews with 22 stations, starting on September 9. Schroeder and Oakley became the primary interviewees for these broadcasts, one of which was with the ABC radio network, which has 2,000 affiliates. Giglio says that the radio broadcasts hit key segments, such as the parents and

aunts and uncles of impacted students.

Schroeder says “the media was really intrigued with the idea that colleges and universities could, in fact, come together so quickly and respond. They were also proud. As I talked to people in Texas or even New York, they were proud of particular institutions that were either geographically close to them or that they had an association with. They would ask if their alma mater was participating. There was a sense of pride knowing that nearby there were institutions participating in this kind of effort.”

## **B. What Didn't Work**

A print advertising campaign was perceived as not being as successful as any of the other promotional strategies. Near the end of September, one-third-page print advertisements were placed in more than 70 State of Louisiana community and weekly newspapers and 10 major city daily newspapers in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas. It is believed that the print advertising money could have been utilized more effectively. The reasoning behind taking out these ads was based on a perception that displaced students and their parents were getting news primarily through newspapers. However, when the ads ran, there was no spike in visitors to the Sloan Semester website, which Seaman had been closely monitoring right from the start of its launch.

## **C. Tracking Results**

“The bulk of all the website traffic came from referring websites at key institutions, including not just impacted institutions,” says Seaman. “For example, the state of Florida’s Department of Education website put up a link for us and became a top referrer. But the bulk of all the students had come in and hit our website prior to the print ads going out.” Some of the largest number of hits originated from the Delgado Community College, Xavier University, and University of New Orleans websites, which, perhaps not coincidentally, wound up having the highest number of Sloan Semester students.

“What you can also see is a spike in referrers from people who actually saw the press release and then clicked on the link (that was live inside the press release),” adds Seaman. “What you also see is people searching Google for the Sloan Semester and then coming in. Those searchers timed out to be exactly when the press releases came out.”

## **D. Communications with Louisiana Education Leaders**

Chaloux also helped with communication and promotional efforts, primarily through SREB’s working relationship with the Louisiana Board of Regents and the Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS). For example, Jerry Pinsel, LCTCS vice president for Academic and Student Affairs, explains how 18,000 students from Delgado Community College were severely impacted due to that institution closing down. “Doing something electronically became extremely important. . . The Sloan Semester was a blessing.” Pinsel adds that many faculty from impacted institutions had some online teaching skills, but most had no experience whatsoever teaching fully online courses. Hence, an institution such as Delgado had limited options, even after they had managed to get their elearning systems turned back on. “The other choice was the Sloan Semester had already identified schools willing to provide courses from schools with the expertise and manpower to do it. Wow! What a great resource.”

Larry Tremblay, associate commissioner for Planning and Research for the Louisiana Board of Regents, also had high praise for the Sloan Semester. He explains how the Board of Regents had started an

initiative two days after the hurricane hit, called the Louisiana Higher Education Response Team (LAHERT), which dealt with protecting and helping its displaced students. “Bruce (Chaloux) came to us with the Sloan Semester idea. . . . We informed LAHERT (which was holding meetings every other day at the time) about the initiative and charged the systems to support it and get it out to their campuses as soon as possible.” However, the reaction to the Sloan Semester from impacted institutions was mixed, for a variety of reasons, including a fear that students, and revenues, would be lost, even though the Sloan Semester was strictly a “bridge” offering, whereby students were encouraged to return to their home institutions in the coming Spring 2006 term. Nonetheless, there were institutions that participated, and “I think the Sloan Semester was tremendously successful in terms of the short turn around,” Tremblay says. “We in higher education don’t have a very good reputation for changing things quickly, but I think the Sloan Semester was a shining star in that regard.”

### **E. Illuminating Providers**

Another part of the overall communication process entailed Sloan-C organizing an Elluminate Live session for prospective providers on September 7. Elluminate is a web conferencing tool that enables groups of people to hold synchronous meetings and presentations that includes audio and video. The Sloan-C organization had a lot of experience hosting these types of web conferencing events through its Sloan-C workshop program. More than 60 representatives from prospective provider institutions attended the session, asking a myriad of questions that were fielded professionally and efficiently by Chaloux, Oakley and Schroeder. This clarification process with providers about how the overall initiative would move forward lead to the further development of a valuable Frequently Asked Questions section on the providers’ website.

## **VI. NEXT STEPS IN THE PROCESS: COMMUNICATING WITH PROVIDERS AND STUDENTS AND PUBLISHING THE CATALOG**

While all these important promotional and communication activities were churning across the country through numerous media outlets and a wide variety of electronic vehicles, two new and important team members came on board: John Sener on September 9 and Kathy Frizzell on September 12. Sener worked on communicating with provider institutions and prospective students, and Frizzell became the manager of a team of virtual advisors from around the country who volunteered to help Sloan Semester students.

In addition, it is important to stress that, during these early days (August 31 through September 15), the SREB staff was very busy with constructing a highly sophisticated web-based course catalog, registration process, and reporting system that would go live on September 15 and ultimately keep the entire Sloan Semester on track through the end of this initiative in January 2006.

### **A. Playing Matchmaker**

Sener, who is an effective practices editor for Sloan-C and independent online learning consultant, immediately started to help Oakley with the numerous communications from providers and prospective students that were piling up in his email box and keeping him up at all hours of the night.

As a side note, Oakley jokingly says he “did not sleep for six weeks,” with regard to the management responsibilities he took on over the course of the entire Sloan Semester project. Incidentally, all of the staffers from Sloan-C and SREB typically worked 12- to 16-hour days, especially during the early phases of this initiative, and nobody complained about the long hours. In fact, the opposite occurred, with

everyone saying they had a profound sense of purpose and satisfaction working on a project that they knew was helping people.

When Sener started on September 9, the Steering Committee was advised by Oakley to cease allowing new provider institutions to volunteer courses. Over 160 regionally accredited institutions were on the list ready to be officially approved. Of that list, 153 got the go-ahead by the Steering Committee to become Sloan Semester providers. Sener was busy communicating with these providers via individualized emails about what they needed to do, sending customized boiler-plate responses that had been developed by Oakley. “September 9 was a very busy day,” Sener says. “I had more than 120 emails from providers on that day alone.”

At this time, Sener’s job, in addition to communicating with providers, quickly changed to creating a list of courses that students were requesting—as they had noted on their student interest forms—and matching these requests with the courses that the provider institutions were volunteering to offer, as noted on the provider interest forms. Sener was accessing the back-end database system that Seaman had built, which was a spreadsheet that ultimately became a course list that grew in numbers from early September up to the day courses started on October 10 through December 1. He organized this list into subject categories that were used by the Steering Committee and the provider institutions to get a clearer sense of what students wanted and what provider courses should be added to the catalog that SREB was producing.

Sener was also responding to student questions that were coming through an online form on the Sloan Semester website. These questions and answers formed the beginning stages of a sophisticated virtual academic advisors system that Seaman built (see “Advisors Play Key Role,” below).

## **B. Providers Start Entering Course Data**

The provider institutions listserv was also getting daily posts from Oakley, who was providing instructions for how providers should list their courses inside the catalog being developed by SREB, as well as detailed information and announcements concerning the progress of the entire initiative.

On September 10, it was noted that Mary Larson, SREB’s associate director of the Electronic Campus (EC) was managing the Sloan Semester catalog. At the start of this process, her job was to contact a single individual at each providing institution and provide that person with login information so they could enter course data using the EC’s Course Data Entry (CDE) system. Each institution was allowed to submit 10 courses for the catalog at this time. (This number eventually increased substantially at some institutions that could meet the demand for specific courses being requested by students.) Larson was also responsible for approving courses that would ultimately wind up inside the catalog, as well as approving the student application forms that would start coming in at a rapid pace. To help her with all these responsibilities, she enlisted the help of SREB personnel Associate Director of the Adult Learning Campaign Angela Birkes, EC Consultant Alice Ann Bailey, Administrative Assistant Bernitta Harris, and Administrative Assistant Ihuoma Johnson.

On September 11, Oakley wrote to the provider listserv that the list of needed courses had “greatly expanded.” On September 13, he thanked institutions that were entering their course data into the CDE system, which was growing quickly. In addition, expanded resources for providers were regularly being published on the providers website, including a list of courses that were still needed, an expanded FAQ section, a PDF download of a newly created Sloan Semester Provider Manual, a press release template

that providers could use to announce their participation in the Sloan Semester (which many used), and a listing of donations and special offers being provided by various vendors, who were not affiliated or endorsed by the Sloan Semester, to hurricane-impacted students.

It was also announced that a listserv for volunteering academic advisors was just launched, as well as a listserv for financial aid personnel. “We are getting lots of questions from students about financial aid,” Oakley noted. Fortunately Chaloux had a connection with the Texas Guarantee Student Loan Corporation (TSLC) through its Assistant Vice President Sam Wilson. TSLC is a public, nonprofit corporation that administers the Federal Family Education Loan Program. “I asked Sam if they could help,” says Chaloux. “He asked me for a formal request. Sam passed it on to the leadership, and they provided access to their toll free number and staff and provided real-time financial aid counseling and assistance to the Sloan Semester students free of charge.”

Basically all the wheels were now in motion for a September 15 online catalog launch.

### **C. September 15 Online Course Catalog Launch**

Oakley’s post to the provider institutions listserv on the morning of September 15, started out with “Greetings! We now have almost 900 courses in the Sloan Semester Catalog from 113 providing institutions. Thanks to everyone for working so diligently on this.” He also urged institutions that had not yet entered the CDE system to do so ASAP. In addition, it was noted that 1,000 students had signed up through the SloanSemester.org student interest form, which was being taken down as the catalog went live later that evening. In its place was the VESA form.

On the morning of September 16, Oakley’s early morning post to the provider institutions listerv announced that the live catalog had grown to 1,000 courses in its database and that students were already looking through the catalog and contacting advisors. “Thanks again for making the Sloan Semester a reality,” Oakley wrote. “We went from concept to live catalog in 16 days!”

## **VII. HOW SREB’S ELECTRONIC CAMPUS PROCESSED SLOAN SEMESTER DATA**

Meanwhile, the SREB staff was busy making sure that each and every CDE form was accurate before making each available course live inside the Sloan Semester online catalog. The process mimicked the way in which courses are approved and posted to SREB’s EC catalog except everything was done at a much quicker pace. “We simply modified our current Electronic Campus form to include a field that said Sloan Semester participant,” Larson says. “And they (providers) could click on that, and that became our signal that they did not have to be as detailed as we would normally require for Electronic Campus participation.”

Larson further explains that one person from each provider institution was responsible for completing the CDE form that required such information as a course description; available sections; if there were any prerequisites; and what learning resources were needed to be accessed online, such as the bookstore and the library. Once the CDE form was submitted, the SREB staff reviewed all the data for accuracy and to ensure that all links to the provider’s course were not dead.

As the SREB staff was diligently checking CDE forms, Larson was also working with the folks at Xap to

facilitate proper real-time activation of the online admissions and registration system that required students to fill out VESA forms that were integrated with the courses they were interested in.

“As courses were being added and activated by our staff here in the Electronic Campus office, the student, when he or she went into the online catalog, was able to select the institutions and courses they wanted to enroll in, and they were only able to see active courses that still had room in them,” Larson explains. “That was a huge step forward because it meant they were enrolling in live courses instead of trying to enroll in courses that were closed.”

As students completed their VESA forms, they had to be reviewed and finalized by the SREB staff before being sent to the relative provider institutions. In some instances, students, even though the VESA form was not cumbersome, were not filling out all the necessary fields. The SREB staff would then notify these students to complete their forms.

## **A. Processing VESAs**

The next step was to handle the back-end side of the actual student approval process once the completed VESA forms were finalized. This approval process was a batch data processing action whereby the student information would first get matched with the available courses database, and then all this information would be pulled into a long spreadsheet. SREB’s Director of Information Technology J.J. Kwashnak developed a form that would display the information from the spreadsheet into a more user-friendly format for the SREB staff to view and then ultimately release to the institution. This entire process was called Level 1 approval, and it ensured that students were indeed from hurricane-impacted institutions.

The provider institutions were notified through a file transfer process also set up by Kwashnak. This process entailed notifying institutions by email when students had applied for courses. Provider institution registrars would then go to a special VESA.SREB website that held each student’s VESA information for the provider institutions to admit or reject. Kwashnak explains that it was important to structure the file transfer/website process in a secure way. “We were holding sensitive student information, including social security numbers and things that could be associated with identify theft, so we had to up the security issues and move from a passive email system to a web-based system,” he says. Basically, providers would enter a secure password-protected website and obtain the VESA data they needed instead of having it sent to them in a manner that could possibly be intercepted.

## **B. Building a Data Collection Reporting System**

While Kwashnak was dealing with building these systems, he also was given the task of building a data collection reporting system that would give the Sloan Steering Committee real-time information regarding what courses were being filled by whom, what courses might still be needed, and which providers might be able to fulfill that need. Kwashnak says that building this reporting system was “a trial-and-error, on-the-fly kind of thing” that “grew organically as we needed things.”

“He (Kwashnak) essentially became the Sloan Semester registrar,” says Chaloux. In addition, “he was the key at developing a set of systems and reports that we could track in real time on what was happening. Then his responsibilities shifted again as the students started to submit changes to us (see below). He handled all of that and all of the registration processes, and he had at least 153 contacts at all the institutions he worked closely with. He got heavily involved more so than he thought he was going to,

with both student interactions and institutional interactions by telephone and by email. Finally I just got out of his way because he was doing what needed to get done and he kept everyone happy, including me.”

## **VIII. CHALLENGES AND CHANGES**

One of the problems that occurred as institutions began to process student VESAs was that some institutions did not react in a timely fashion, leaving students in a state of limbo, wondering if, in fact, they were officially registered for their course(s). For example, a number of providers waited too long for multiple VESAs to come through before getting back to students. Plus, these same providers would batch-process VESAs and respond to students via mass-email. In addition to these applications not getting processed quickly enough, spam-killer software intercepted the mass emails, so the prospective students did not even receive the proper notification when it was sent.

Larson notes that the some institutions were well prepared for an influx of student VESAs while others were not. The result of this was that students were inundating SREB and Sloan-C with emails and telephone calls, asking whether or not they were admitted. In addition, a good number of provider institutions were contacting SREB and Sloan-C with questions related to the entire process of officially accepting and enrolling students.

### **A. Dealing with Drop/Add/Withdraw Process**

To make things even more challenging, students started to change their course requests, dropping and adding courses as new ones became available. Others decided to withdraw all together, realizing that taking a course was too much of a challenge as they coped with the immediacy of their uprooted lives. This entire drop/add/withdraw process, which became heaviest near the last week of September up through course start dates, brought about another series of responsibilities and tasks for the SREB staff. “It was something that we did not anticipate,” says Larson. “It turned into a big process that had to be done manually.”

### **B. Textbook Snafu**

Another challenge arose for students when it became evident that the cost of books was not covered by the Sloan Semester. Plus, some students enrolled in courses at the last minute and were not able to get their all-important books in time for their first week of assignments, putting them behind schedule before they even started. “In retrospect, we should have done something to get books to the students,” says Oakley. “When you have lost everything, \$100 for textbooks is something you may not be able to afford. For a single mother on financial aid going to Delgado Community College, \$100 for books can be a deal breaker.”

### **C. Numbers Increase**

Regardless of such challenges and concerns, many students did enroll in courses and were well prepared to move forward with their education. On September 19, Oakley wrote to the provider listserv that that online catalog listed 1,100 courses from 138 institutions. On September 20, he noted that more than 600 courses from 98 providers had been requested by students and that one course had been requested by 10 students. On September 21, Oakley wrote that 1,149 courses were in the catalog from 148 institutions. He also noted that students were increasingly responding in a positive way:

I wish I could share with you some of the email we are receiving from students who have been impacted by Katrina. The students describe some really difficult circumstances, and they state that the opportunity to remain in college this Fall through the Sloan Semester means a great deal to them. It is really giving them hope for getting their lives back to normal. So thanks again to all of you for providing this educational opportunity to so many people.

## **IX. ADVISORS PLAY KEY ROLE**

While all these catalog and registration processes were occurring, a team of student advisors had been organized and working under the management of Kathy Frizzell, who came on board on September 12. The story of how Frizzell became involved is interesting to note.

Frizzell is a recently retired (as of June 2005) academic counselor who had worked at Parkland Community College in Champaign, IL for 16 years. In early September, she read an article in her local newspaper about the Sloan Semester. Given her experience, and her relative freedom as a recent retiree, she thought that, maybe, she could help out in some way, so she called Oakley (whom she knew as a personal friend and colleague) and scheduled a meeting with him. Oakley hired her on the spot to coordinate the entire academic advising portion of the Sloan Semester. Frizzell, however, was very hesitant at first to take on such a role, because, as an experienced academic counselor on a traditional campus, she preferred, and was more accustomed to, providing face-to-face advising services to students. “But, I’m not an online person,” she told Oakley. “Oh, don’t worry about that,” Oakley replied. “We can get you through that.”

The short version of this story is that Frizzell had never provided online advising services before, and she was not very experienced with online technologies, in general. However, over a very short period of time, she managed to become a first-class virtual advisor who lead a team of 41 additional virtual advisors, all of whom she interacted with online. In short, she became proficient and effective with using email and listservs to communicate with students and fellow advisors, with developing content for publication on a website, and with participating in web-based conferences. Frizzell’s involvement with the Sloan Semester is another testament to how online technologies can be rapidly adopted and used effectively by a relatively inexperienced user of such technologies. “An interesting thing for me about working online is that it stopped feeling virtual,” says Frizzell. “At the beginning there was a lot of ‘Well, how do you do that?’ And then once you get over that, it is really easy. It becomes second nature. And I do think the students were well served through online advising.”

### **A. Developing an Online System for Advisors**

Frizzell jumped into creating policies and an online tutorial for a virtual advisors system that was being constructed as she and her colleagues started answering a barrage of questions that were coming from students through a “Sloan Semester student question entry form.” These questions, along with the students’ contact information, were automatically passed to a secure advisors website that all the volunteer Sloan Semester advisors were given individual username and password access to. The advisors would respond to these questions through another form that would generate a direct email response to the students. After responding, the original question was marked on the advisor’s website as being answered.

“We were creating a system as we were using a system,” says Frizzell. “We were always running one step ahead of ourselves, saying ‘Well, okay, this student has asked this question, so what is our policy going to be?’ Or, ‘What do we need to make this happen?’ So, it was flying by the seat of our pants.”

Part of the advisor-system creation process included developing an effective online FAQ section for students that became an extremely important feature of the Sloan Semester website. Another challenge concerned understanding and advising students about what provider institution courses in the new online catalog were equivalent to the courses students had registered for at their home institutions. For example, “students would write in and say ‘I’m in Psychology 237 at Delgado Community College.’ They did not realize that other colleges from across the country don’t call that course Psychology 237,” says Frizzell.

The answer to solving this challenge was found through a service called CollegeSource Online, a virtual library representing more than 33,700 college catalogues, including the hurricane-impacted institutions, in full cover-to-cover, original page format. CollegeSource offered free access to Sloan Semester advisors to match the courses students were requesting with the courses being offered by the provider institutions.

“As we were figuring out things, setting policy and procedures, I was collecting all these nuggets of information and sending daily updates (to an advisors listserv), giving them that information so that they would be able to answer questions appropriately,” says Frizzell.

On October 5, she posted the following to the advisors listserv:

Help! Sloan Semester students and the advising team need your help to handle the increased advising load. We have reached a critical stage as most classes are due to start next week. All the usual actions are taking place, including courses becoming full and closed and students needing immediate advising to identify alternatives; students panicking if they have not received confirmation from their requested schools and trying to needlessly add additional courses; students changing their minds about what they want to take, students waiting until the last minute to register, etc. All typical in the life of an advisor. And all leading to my request for as much time as you can devote to handling student questions and course requests over the next few days, specifically through Monday, October 10.

Also on this same listserv post, Frizzell noted a student’s heart-felt message upon learning, through an email message, of her eligibility to take courses through the Sloan Semester:

Oh, my gosh.! This is just the most wonderful email message I have opened in a long, long, long time. Yes, we all do what we can to make a positive difference, and I’ll be very sure that all who had anything to do with making that difference for me know of my ongoing appreciation now and as the relief effort goes on. I’ll be keeping you all in my prayers - of that you can be sure. Be blessed, for you surely deserve it, all of you, and not just for helping me, but for all the good you are doing for so many. Your generosity is very humbling. Thanks too for the ‘good luck’ for my studies. It’s my fondest hope that I’ll do well.

## **X. OVERWHELMING EXPERIENCES**

One week prior to October 10, new VESAs, and changes to old VESAs, were arriving by the minute. Oakley wrote on the provider’s listserv that “students were being students, forwarding last-minute changes in courses and adding or dropping courses.” So, the week leading up to October 10 was a very busy one for all parties involved with the Sloan Semester. “We had developed a whole set of systems to support this effort, and it was all consuming,” says Chaloux. “We were involved from the first thing in the morning, and there were emails and phone calls being exchanged at 11 or 12 at night. At the same time, it was heart warming because you knew you were reaching out to students. We threw a lifeline out to them,

and it was a way to create some normalcy in their lives that had become very abnormal because of the hurricanes.”

“If you ever felt like you were overworked or feeling sorry for yourself, you just had to talk to a student,” says Larson. “They had nothing. They were trying to figure out how they could keep their Internet service up and running. Some had gone from living in a dorm to suddenly living back at home with their families with all their siblings, trying to concentrate and take courses. Some were working two jobs, trying to get enough money to recreate their living space and still go to school.

“It was rewarding in that students were grateful, and they said so,” she continues. “They thought the Sloan Semester was great. They really appreciated people taking out time to make this work and help them through this term.”

## **XI. STATS AND FACTS**

About 60% of all the Sloan Semester courses started on October 10. The remaining courses started sometime between October 10 and December 12, with most remaining courses starting on October 17.

The overall big picture of the Sloan Semester was ultimately detailed through the following statistics that were generated through Kwashnak’s reporting system:

- 153 institutions offered a total of 1,345 fully online courses. 800 courses offered by 135 institutions from 36 states wound up enrolling Sloan Semester students.
- 4,114 seats were requested by students.
- 1,736 students applied to the Sloan Semester and 1,587 were admitted.
- Some of the courses enrolled only Sloan Semester students, and other courses enrolled a mix of Sloan Semester students with the institution’s native students.
- 5,245 seats inside the Sloan Semester courses were filled by native students.
- More than 75% of Sloan Semester students were female, and 49.5% were African American.
- 26.3% of Sloan Semester students came from Xavier University, 24.6% came from Delgado Community College, 9.4% came from Loyola University, and 7.9% came from the University of New Orleans. The remaining Sloan Semester students were spread across 26 hurricane-impacted campuses.
- The top five institutions registering Sloan Semester students were Massachusetts Colleges Online, Community College of Denver, Northwestern State University, San Jacinto College, and Tulsa Community College.
- 158 seats were denied because students did not meet requirements or deadlines. 81 seats were denied because the course was cancelled. 312 seats were dropped because the student failed to communicate. 962 seats were withdrawn by the student.

## **XII. WORDS FROM FACULTY AND STAFF FROM PROVIDER INSTITUTIONS**

What follows is a synthesis of faculty and staff, from three of the larger course providers, talking about their experiences managing the Sloan Semester at their institutions, along with their interactions with

colleagues and students.

## **A. Massachusetts Colleges Online**

Suzan Kinaci is director of technology and administrative services for Massachusetts Colleges Online (MCO), a consortium of 15 community colleges and 9 state colleges in Massachusetts that offer online courses and programs. Thirteen MCO institutions participated in the Sloan Semester.

MCO institutions filled 152 seats in 51 courses and, combined, was the largest Sloan Semester provider. The courses that received the most enrollments were Human Sexuality, Introduction to Philosophy, and Introduction to Sociology.

“We tapped into our existing network and notified everyone that we had been invited to participate in the Sloan Semester,” Kinaci says, adding that she established communications with liaisons from each of the 13 participating institutions. She also developed an efficient system for passing on student VESA information to everyone in a timely manner. “As registrations came in, I sent them back to the liaisons, and they took it from there,” she says. “I think everyone found it to be a really great activity, although no one anticipated how much time it was actually going to take.

“It was a good experience all around,” she continues. “When there’s a will, this whole extremely slow-moving mechanism called Academia can move pretty fast to do things that are out of the norm.”

### **1. Philosophy Out of Disaster**

James Gustafson was a faculty member from MCO’s Northern Essex Community College who taught an Introduction to Philosophy course that he compressed from a 16-week course to an 8-week course for the Sloan Semester. He had 12 Sloan Semester students, and “a couple” dropped out “for reasons I am not sure of,” he says. Overall, the students “did remarkably well - some of them outstanding.”

Gustafson adds that he found the Sloan Semester students’ discussion forum posts to be “somewhat different from my other students. For example, when we discussed the meaning of life, especially in the face of suffering, several mentioned the hardships of having their lives (and their families’ lives) torn apart by the Katrina disaster. . .

“In all this, none of them rejected their belief in God, even though it had shaken them. Their explanations? Tragedy often brings out the best in people and challenges us to become better people. It may be a kind of test of the depth of our virtue. . .

“It is hard for me to imagine what some of them are coping with, having nothing left except the clothes on their backs and what little they could take with them when the waters rose to devastate everything in their environment. I have great respect for each and every one of them, and for those who are pitching in to make their lives a little better.

“I think these tragedies bring out some of the better virtues that are lurking deep in our hearts, and we want to do something to help people who have suffered a blow, to move forward in their lives and recover from it. So, I was personally very satisfied to be invited to take part in the Sloan Semester.”

## **B. Community College of Denver**

Jeanne Stroh is director of Online Learning for the Community College of Denver (CCD), which filled 133 seats with Sloan Semester students in 11 courses, the second highest of all the providers. Stroh explains how the Sloan Semester became a very labor-intensive process for the CCD online learning support staff because every student VESA had to be processed manually into the CCD student information system. Plus, the back-and-forth communications with students, as well as with other units within the CCD system, got to be a somewhat cumbersome process. “I was sending emails to students and keeping lists updated,” she says. “I started checking off ‘did I send the letter, did I hear back from them, are they registered?’ And I had to follow up and make sure that the college did not charge them tuition because the college automatically bills them.”

She adds that if students said they had the appropriate prerequisites for a Sloan Semester course, their word was enough for acceptance, because, due to the devastation occurring at their home institutions, there was no access to official transcripts. This created registration conflicts that had to be resolved through repeated communications that required some “convincing” on Stroh’s part.

Some of her interactions with students are also interesting to note. She advised one student, for instance, who had never taken an online course in her life, to enroll in one course instead of four courses that she was planning to take. “She called me at one point when she had gone back to New Orleans and said ‘thank you for talking me out of taking all those classes.’ She had children, a husband and other family members in New Orleans, and she said ‘I had no idea what I would be coming back to, and there was no way’ (she could have completed four 8-week, compressed online courses).”

### **1. Stablein’s Sociology Course**

Sally Stablein taught a Sociology 101 course at CCD that had 14 Sloan Semester students. Unlike many of the Sloan Semester courses, all students in this particular course completed it. There were no drop outs or withdrawals, and 13 earned a grade of A. “They all went above and beyond; they were all spectacular,” Stablein says.

About one half of these students had lost their homes and had to make arrangements to get adequate Internet access, with friends, relatives, employers, the local library etc. “I had a group of students who were very grateful for what they had at the time,” she adds. “That is one of the things that was so shocking and surprising to me. I thought that by taking this course I would perhaps be dealing with issues because of their circumstances and the things they had gone through. But whatever issues they may have had did not affect the class. I almost think that the class was like an outlet for them.”

Stablein explains that the course was accelerated and required a good deal of reading, writing, a final paper, a final exam, and regularly scheduled discussion forums based on chapter readings where students had to “go above and beyond simply discussing an issue.” She claims that her experience working with Sloan Semester students online “was one of the most positive I had. I actually had to keep up with them.”

## **C. Tulsa Community College**

Tulsa Community College (TCC) filled 77 seats in 12 courses and was the fifth largest Sloan Semester provider. Randy Dominguez, dean of Distance Learning at TCC, explains that building the infrastructure

to accommodate Sloan Semester students was similar to how the Distance Learning Department had contracted to offer corporate-training courses in the past. “We did not just move these students into existing courses. We created new course sections, and then the question became how do we track these students when, in essence, we were not really enrolling them as TCC students.”

Carroll Jones, Distance Learning registrar at TCC, says that he had to create a system whereby no tuition charges and a different matriculation status would be applied to the Sloan Semester courses. He evaluated each VESA that came in and manually admitted students accordingly. “It was a matter of treating them like a student walking into our school and starting the application process. I had to go through an application for each student and load that into our system.” Students were then contacted and provided online instructions on how to use the TCC Blackboard course management system, as well as passed on to the instructor of the course they were enrolled in for future communications.

Jones explains that some students never followed through. “In the very beginning it was hard to get in touch with them, but as the semester went on, it became easier, given that more productivity was taking place in the devastated areas. However, even by cell phone, there were a lot of students who could not be reached.” Some students simply could not get the computer and Internet access they needed to take courses they had actually signed up for. Due to such extenuating circumstances, many of these students simply could not, or did not, contact TCC.

### **1. Dewayne Dickens’ African American Literature Course**

An example of this inability for students to follow through on their commitment to take a Sloan Semester course, which is understandable considering what they were dealing with in their uprooted lives, can be found in a TCC sophomore-level African American Literature course taught by Dewayne Dickens.

Ten students enrolled in this course, but only one actually finished the work required for a passing grade. “The discussions for the first few units were good,” says Dickens. But as the course requirements started leaning toward more intense reading of the textbook and posting more significant responses to the discussion board, “the conversations started dwindling.” Dickens then contacted students individually by phone or email, trying to help them in any way he could. “What they were telling me was that this was their first online course. They were not sure of how to find things online or how they were supposed to respond.” In addition, some did not have the textbook. Others were returning back to Louisiana, dealing with insurance claims and trying to salvage belongings, or having difficulties with getting access to a computer. “You could tell that taking the Sloan Semester course was their one potential for working on their education,” he explains. “But it was not ideal for them because they would have never chosen an online course if they had a choice between a face-to-face class or online. However, this was what they were being offered, what was being paid for. It was a wonderful opportunity, but unfortunately their learning preference did not fit into this mode of learning.”

Dickens tried a number of strategies to keep these students engaged. At close to mid-point in the course, he changed the discussion board requirements and basically converted the course into a self-paced format whereby they had to read the textbook and write three papers within a variety of options. Plus, he provided deadlines that he thought the students could handle. Still, only one student completed the course. The remaining had to be withdrawn from the course so they would not receive failing grades.

“A crisis creates a certain situation, but also there is the reality that sometimes you just can’t fix some things,” says Dickens. “The students had the opportunity, and they realized that people were trying to

assist them, and I know that they learned something, even if they did not finish. There is always something learned.”

### **XIII. WORDS FROM THREE SLOAN SEMESTER STUDENTS**

Dickens’ comments sets the stage for three uniquely different and brief stories that help paint a picture of what many hurricane-impacted students experienced and learned during the Sloan Semester.

#### **A. Christine Montez Stack**

Montez Stack was indirectly affected by Katrina because she was in Denver when it hit, where she lives, works, and is a member of the Colorado National Guard. The Sloan Semester was also made available to all National Guard students who were deployed to the Gulf Coast region to help with relief efforts. Montez Stack was registered in three courses at the Community College of Denver (CCD) that she had to drop out of when she was called up for hurricane-relief duty. One course, in particular, in microbiology, was very important to her because it was a required course that would get her accepted into a registered nurse program. “This was my last semester to get it done,” she says. “But when the hurricane hit, I felt that was a priority, and if that meant I could not start my RN program for another year, it was just the way it was going to have to be. I felt very strongly that this was something I needed to do.”

Montez Stack is 32, married, with a teenage daughter. She serves in the 140<sup>th</sup> Service Flight at the Buckley Air National Guard Base in Colorado as an education and training manager. On September 2, she was on a plane to be stationed at the Combat Readiness Training Center in Gulfport, Mississippi. Before departing, she dropped out of three classes she was registered for at CCD.

“When we touched ground, we hit the floor running,” she says. “We had a lot of cleanup to do. That is where we started. They did not have power or hot potable water.” It was about two weeks before she was able to log onto a computer from her station in Gulfport. She brought her laptop with her, plus there was a computer lab available on the base. She found out about the Sloan Semester when she visited the CCD website, where it was announced on the front page. Once she was given permission from her commanding officer, Montez Stack registered for a Sloan Semester microbiology section, which happened to be taught by the same instructor for the class she had dropped out of. She also registered for an ethics section at CCD.

She says there were about 30 Sloan Semester students in the microbiology course and about 45 Sloan Semester students in the ethics course. She believes that she was the only National Guard student in both courses. She calls her fellow students in both courses “incredible,” adding that “it was quite impressive to see how these people took their adversity and made it a stepping stone towards their success instead of letting it get them down.”

Montez Stack completed and passed both courses. She started taking them while on duty in Gulfport and was fortunate in that she was able to return home to Denver about one-third the way through the 8-week semester and complete her studies under much less stress than what the hurricane-impacted students were experiencing. “I was fortunate that the Sloan program came on board and that they allowed the National Guard to become part of it,” she says. “I was not affected at all. I would not be starting my RN program (in January 2006) if it was not for the Sloan program.”

## **B. Jessie Zeringue**

Jessie Zeringue is 39, married with three children (age 7 through 13), and works full-time as a secretary for the Crime Science Division of the St. Charles Parish Sheriff's Department. The Zeringue family also lives in St. Charles Parish, which is 25 miles west of New Orleans. "We did not have as much damage," she says. "We still have our jobs, and most of us have our houses."

Zeringue was getting ready to enter her second semester at Delgado Community College (DCC). Previously she had taken a remedial math course and was now registered for three courses at DCC when Katrina hit. Her goal is to eventually become a registered nurse. When DCC closed down and she found out about the Sloan Semester, she registered for three courses to make up for what she couldn't take at Delgado: English 101 from Southeast Arkansas College, Introduction to Sociology from CCD (Stablein's course), and Introduction to Psychology from Northwestern State University in Louisiana. She had never before taken an online course.

"At first I was a little confused, but it all worked out," she says. "If I had questions, there were people to contact, and they helped us get what we needed. Once they got our email addresses, they communicated with us and explained what we needed to do. They had open lines of communication."

Zeringue finished all three courses and had a good experience that she was very grateful for. There were some troubling moments, such as not being able to get her books on time and a few communication snafus. But, "overall I would say it was very positive thing. I was able to continue with the same number of courses I was going to take (at Delgado)." In particular, she had a very high regard for Stablein's sociology course: "She (Stablein) made it great; she was concerned; we had a great discussion board. We learned a lot about sociology, and there was a lot of open communication between the students and the teacher. Everyone's personalities showed through online. That was a really good experience."

## **C. Jennifer Bernstein**

Jennifer Bernstein is 26 and a single mom with a young daughter. She hails from Metairie, a northern suburb of New Orleans. She has a bachelor's degree in psychology and was taking prerequisite courses at DCC that were aimed at possibly getting her accepted into an RN program at Our Lady of the Lake College in New Orleans. She was about to enter her third semester at DCC and was registered for one course when Katrina hit.

At around 5 a.m. on Sunday, August 28, less than one day before Katrina made landfall, Jennifer and her daughter, along with her father, mother and sister, whom she was living with, were notified by a neighbor that a category 5 was on its way and they had better start packing.

It wasn't long before the entire Bernstein family, including Jennifer's grandfather who lived nearby, were boarding up their properties and loading up three cars with their most prized possessions, heading to a relative's house (an uncle on her father's side) in Tennessee.

"It was crazy because we did not have that long to pack," she says. "We assumed that we would be leaving for only a few days. We drove for 14 and a half hours until we got to Birmingham, where we stopped over night. We continued on the next day, and we watched the disaster on television from my uncle's house."

As soon as they were able to, Jennifer and her father and sister drove back to Louisiana to examine what kind of damage they might have sustained. Their home did not have any standing flood water, but the roof was severely damaged and everything smelled pretty bad. Her grandfather's house was completely uninhabitable with about a foot and a half of still-standing water and mold climbing up the walls.

They had to drive back the same day, as there was a 5 p.m. curfew in effect. "We took pictures, and everyone was crying when we got back (to Tennessee). It was horrible," says Jennifer. Fortunately, her uncle owned a vacant condo where the Bernstein's could stay. People in the community came to their aid with extra furniture they donated. Her uncle also had a laptop with a dial-up connection that she could use.

Jennifer found out about the Sloan Semester through the DCC website. Like many Sloan Semester students, she had never taken an online course. She registered for two courses, a nutrition course from Ozarks Technical Community College and a medical terminology course at Tulsa Community College. She says she wound up dropping out of the nutrition course because she could not get PowerPoint to work on her laptop, which was relatively old. She did, however, manage to complete the medical terminology class.

"It has taught me a lot about using the Internet," she says. "I was not one to use the Internet very much, but I thought I should give it a try and do my best. It has been pretty neat." Jennifer adds that she felt learning online was not difficult, although the medical terminology course "was a lot of work," with "a lot of readings and assignments. I have found it to be quite helpful. It has allowed me to complete one of my prerequisites, which is really important."

In the meantime, she has settled in Tennessee until she feels that it's safe for her and her daughter to return. Her family has gone back and is working through repair and insurance issues. "It has become a real big hassle," she says.

Finally, she asks, "Will the Sloan Semester will be offering the same deal next semester?"

#### **XIV. LESSONS LEARNED**

Although the answer to Jennifer's question, and others like her, is an unfortunate "no," the folks at Sloan-C and SREB have indeed started to look at the possibility of developing an emergency asynchronous learning system that would be ready to respond to the next disaster. It was in this spirit that a group of 10 Sloan-C and SREB personnel who had worked diligently throughout the Sloan Semester came together for a meeting held at SREB's headquarters in Atlanta on December 5-6.

In what turned out to be a very lively, and lengthy, discussions centered around individual contributions, lessons learned and what went well, this group has set the stage for a more in-depth exploration, based on direct experience, into how to build a national, or international, online education system that can be utilized by institutions in the event of a dire emergency in which they are forced to close their doors, as what happened in Hong Kong in 2003 and in the Gulf Coast region in 2005.

It was noted at the Atlanta meeting that the production of the Sloan Semester moved very quickly, and the personnel involved were all able to act on decisions individually without too much oversight, because they were operating under a decision-making process guided by the simple notion that "students come first."

This, along with two well-established online learning organizations having the experienced staff and the appropriate technologies at bay, enabled the Sloan Semester to become a reality.

One of the important questions floated at the meeting was “can we do this again, and will we need to do this again?” The resounding answer was “yes.” It was at that point that the meeting then turned to “what can we take from this experience to be able to respond when next time a disaster happens?”

With that question in mind, some of the vital lessons learned, were further discussed at the Atlanta meeting. These lessons are synthesized below.

## **A. General Lessons Learned**

- Institutions were proud to be part of the Sloan Semester.
- Under the right circumstances, you can cut across academic red tape and get things done effectively and quickly.
- Sloan-C needs to use the results of the Sloan Semester to push and promote online learning.
- Impacted institutions were not always appreciative of the Sloan Semester because they wanted to mount their own mini semester to recover tuition dollars. Such institutions did not support credit transfer policies, resulting in many Sloan Semester students dropping out of the courses they registered for.
- Credit recognition, transfer and articulation remain as significant issues in higher education, and credits earned online exacerbates these issues.
- Student services are critical. Providing advising services related to registering and obtaining financial aid, etc. are essential.

## **B. Lessons Learned Related to Students**

- Students are unpredictable. They frequently change their minds about what courses they may or may not want to take.
- Students greatly appreciated the Sloan Semester and equated their return to classes as a return to at least partial normalcy in their lives.
- Students served were largely those who did not have the financial resources to enroll in any other alternatives.
- Because students did not have any personal financial investment in the Sloan Semester, some felt it easier to just walk away when they fell behind in their course work.
- Some students tried to take too many classes. The lure of “free” may have been too tantalizing. Many students did not have a good understanding of what an online course would actually entail.

## **C. Lessons Learned Related to Communications**

- University websites are the key tool for reaching students in a crisis.
- A number of institutions did not do a good job of contacting students once they accessed the VESAs. Some institutions batch processed applications in an untimely fashion, causing students to drop out because they were not properly notified of their acceptance. Some institutions also

sent out mass emails to accepted students, resulting in spam filters blocking such messages, leading to more drop outs.

- It was incredibly difficult to contact administrators and students from impacted institutions even with readily available email addresses and phone numbers.
- Updating content on the Sloan Semester website was a challenge. For example, FAQs and other information can become outdated in a few days. Having a system that incorporates regularly scheduled and timely content editing and updating is important.

#### **D. Lessons Learned Related to Financial Issues**

- Money, or lack of it, is a powerful force that was (and remains) a real concern for many impacted institutions and seemed to drive many of their decisions (to the detriment of what the Sloan Semester was seeking to accomplish).
- Financial aid issues burdened many students, particularly their situation with Pell grants and federal loans.
- The cost of textbooks was, in many cases, enough of a financial burden to prevent students from participating in the Sloan Semester.

#### **E. Lessons Learned Related to System Operations**

- Messages and procedures need to be formally systemized to avoid frustrations related to handling student application processing and service responsibilities.
- Schools and students thought the system was instantaneous and did not allow adequate time to process forms and requests. For example, lag time between course closures and students filling out their VESAs completely and correctly caused a problem. Also, courses should have closed registration at least one week in advance of start time to allow for applications still in the pipeline to get processed, as well as for students to obtain their necessary course materials in a more timely fashion.
- There needs to be an intuitive application process, as well as an efficient and easy drop/add process. Overall, the application feed and download processes should require as little human intervention as possible.
- What is perfectly clear language to some people can be confusing to others. Therefore, if possible, a mock system test with a panel of uninvolved students and personnel would be a helpful and informative endeavor.

#### **F. Lessons Learned Related to Building a Course Catalog**

- Building a mechanism that limits the number of offerings of any one particular subject listed in the online catalog would have made the entire course registration process smoother. There were too many similar courses being offered, leading to enrollments spread widely, and in small numbers, across multiple sections.
- It was difficult to find providers of some specialty courses, such as courses in pharmacy, message therapy, and various special courses needed by some students to meet graduation requirements.
- It was difficult to find exact matches for certain types of mainstream courses, such as chemistry and biology courses for science majors, various information technology courses, and non-Eurocentric world civilization courses.

- It is important to take great care in matching up courses to what students actually need to take.

## XV. CONCLUSION

The big picture view of the Sloan Semester reveals a complex mix of interactions and processes that, in the end, resulted in achieving its main objective to keep students moving along their educational pathways during an unexpected time of need.

It needs to be noted that the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation that funded the Sloan Semester had a sincere trust in the leadership ability of Sloan-C from years of working together in an ongoing effort to expand and promote asynchronous learning. Without that trust, the Sloan Semester would have never happened.

In addition, the Sloan Semester has helped to make it more evident that online learning is recognized as being equal to on-campus learning. Oakley notes that in all of the radio interviews he and Schroeder participated in the issue of quality in online learning never came up.

Finally, perhaps the most endearing take-away message that came out of the Sloan Semester is that our country's spirit of volunteerism is alive and well. Oakley, for instance, explains how working with all the Sloan Semester staff, who put in plenty of overtime hours without compensation, as well as working and communicating with the many faculty and staff from the provider institutions "was an incredibly uplifting experience. It restored my faith in human nature. So many people stepped forward to help."

"It was one of the most pleasurable experiences I ever had," adds Seaman. "You were not doing this to make money. You were not doing this for some anonymous corporation. You were doing this because there were people in need, and maybe this would help them. You were doing it for a reason you could feel good about."

"If you can hit the right cord or nerve within the academic community, they will step up and respond," says Chaloux. "Clearly we had to make all the pieces fit together in order for the Sloan Semester to work. The next story is how do we learn from this, and how do we prepare for deployment next time."

## XVI. ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## XVII. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## XIX. APPENDIX A

### **Emergency ALN: Delivering the Curriculum When the Campus Is Closed Pre-Proposal for a National Workshop**

Much attention has been given to business continuation in the wake of terrorism, natural disaster, and epidemics. But, precious little planning seems to have been put into the continuation of teaching and learning in higher education if physical campuses must be closed for a period of more than a week or two. Certainly such cases are not without precedent; earthquakes, hurricanes, and wars all have taken their toll on universities over the centuries. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century we have come to learn all too well that no country, no institution is impervious to terrorism. Several campuses were seriously affected by the World Trade Center destruction. Buildings, air quality and access were all issues that impacted NYU and PACE among others. But, perhaps it is the looming potential of bio-terrorism and even the apparently naturally-evolved avian flu [1] that poses the most ominous near-term threat to U.S. colleges and universities. Health organizations worldwide are now saying it is not a matter of “if” but rather “how soon” we will face a deadly pandemic of avian flu. The dense dormitory housing in colleges has been long known to be most vulnerable to the spread of such contagious diseases.

Much is at stake for both the institutions and the students enrolled in those institutions. If campuses were closed for more than two or three weeks, many classes could not be completed during the semester. Many students would refuse to pay tuition and fees. All students would be inconvenienced and most delayed in their graduation schedule. Many institutions would not have the cash flow to cover salaries and essential services. Even if the problem were resolved within a semester, many of the students would have transferred elsewhere to complete their degrees, and fewer prospective students would be ready to enroll at a campus with a closure history.

Amid these threats, colleges and universities would be best served if they were to develop contingency plans to continue the delivery of the curriculum if their campuses must be closed. One need only look to the SARS epidemic in Hong Kong to see examples of how some forward-thinking universities were able to deliver their classes in the face of campus closer. Through collaborations with UK universities, a number of classes were able to continue using ALN technologies [2].

At the University of Illinois at Springfield, we have developed a business continuation plan for IT. Just this year, we integrated into that plan methods, milestones, and procedures for continuing the delivery of all of our classes using ALN technologies in the case of an emergency closure of the campus. In developing the plan, we confronted and addressed many issues that are shared by all campuses which engage in such planning. While there are aspects in our plan that are unique to our campus, we believe that our approach provides a prototype for such emergency planning.

A sampling of the issues that must be addressed are:

- Integrating a course management system into the entire curriculum

- Assuring that every course is provided space in the system and that every syllabus is posted
- Proprietary and open source alternatives
- Training faculty members on the use of course management systems to supplement on campus courses and to ramp-up as the primary mode of delivery in case of emergency
- Training students in the use of course management systems
- Determination of milestones for plan deployment (i.e. notice on campus web page on day one, shifting of all classes to online mode on day ten, activation of remote training sites on day seven, etc.)
- Alternative modes of contact with students such as mail, telephone, and schedule synchronous meetings in web conferencing rooms.
- Remote location of servers—either physical re-location of servers from the campus or remote back-up sites from which materials may originate in the case of an emergency that cuts campus connections to the Internet or continues for a lengthy period of time without physical access to campus servers.

The stakes are very high. Terrorism and pandemic threats appear to be increasing. How can we help other campuses across this country to best prepare to continue operations in the face of these threats? One solution would be to launch a series of rapidly cascading workshops to spread best practices across the country over a matter of months.

### **Workshop Proposal**

We propose hosting a two-day workshop at the University of Illinois at Springfield. Presenters at the workshop would include persons from two or three universities that have confronted such closures and two or three universities that have developed comprehensive plans; representatives of federal or state offices of emergency preparedness, homeland security, and related agencies. Participants would be selected from among Sloan Consortium member colleges and universities. Approximately 24 representatives from a range of community colleges, regional universities and R-1 institutions would be invited from geographically dispersed sections of the country.

Outcomes of the workshop would be that each participating institution would develop a comprehensive emergency plan for the continuing delivery of on campus classes in a situation where the physical campus would be closed for a period of two or more weeks. Most importantly, each participating institution, as a condition of participation, would agree to deliver a one-day workshop on their campus within six months of the Springfield workshop. Each of these secondary workshops would include at least ten institutions within driving distance. The secondary workshops would include distribution and explanation of template planning documents for the rapid development of a workable teaching/learning continuation plan using ALN technologies.

A central web site would be maintained with all of the essential documents and materials for conducting the workshops. The site would also provide discussion boards (perhaps through the Sloan-C community Moodle) and a daily update of relevant news and developments such as we provide at Sloan-C through the RSS dissemination of my blog.

The most immediate outcome of the Springfield workshop would be 264 colleges, community colleges, and universities spread across the country developing effective curriculum delivery plans within nine

months. The workshops would generate news coverage, journal articles and presentations at professional conferences, all of which would further spread the practices.

One anticipated side-effect of the spread of ALN-based contingency curriculum delivery plans that will come from the Springfield workshop is an expansion of exposure and use of ALN among colleges and universities across the country. Plans will call for at the very least a minimal use of a course management system for every class on participating campuses. Surely many faculty members will be exposed for the first time to these technologies. Some of those may take advantage of the technologies to move their classes into blended or fully-online delivery modes.

The central location of Springfield, Illinois with service via major east-west and north-south interstates, Amtrak, and American Connection and United Express airline jet connections to Chicago and St. Louis make the location a good one for economy of travel expenses. The collective ALN and workshop delivery experience of the University of Illinois campuses and U of I Online assure that this workshop will be successfully run. The relatively low cost of high quality Crowne Plaza, Renaissance, and Hilton hotels in this small city also reduces overall expenses. New, technologically-advanced facilities on the campus assure we will have the connectivity and display capabilities for an excellent experience. An array of historical Lincoln sites in Springfield, including the newly-completed Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum provides an interesting diversion for spouses and others who might accompany attendees.

### **Conclusion**

We are motivated to share our experiences in developing an emergency curriculum delivery plan based on ALN technologies as a way of sharing with others what we have learned. This is a critical need that is time sensitive. We believe that by cascading workshops we can most effectively spread the best practices nationwide within a year. Our experience in ALN, combined with economies of our location, make UIS and Springfield, Illinois the best choice for hold such a workshop.

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## **XX. APPENDIX B**

### **Sloan Foundation Response to the Katrina Disaster—Version 1.4**

Submitted 31 August 2005 by:

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An editorial in the New York Times on 31 August 2005 stated:

Those of us in New York watch the dire pictures from Louisiana with keen memories of the time after Sept. 11, when the rest of the nation made it clear that our city was their city, and that everyone was part of the battle to restore it. New Orleans, too, is one of the places that belong to every American's heart—even for people who have never been there. Right now it looks as if rescuing New Orleans will be a task much more daunting than any city has faced since the San Francisco fire of 1906. It must be a mission for all of us.

On 30 August 2005, Tulane University President John Cowan wrote:

Our third priority is to develop a recovery plan. This task is impaired right now by the devastation of the city and its infrastructure, and deteriorating further due to the flooding we are now facing. In addition, we don't know when our employees will be able to return to the city, much less to the university. Therefore, until conditions stabilize, it is impossible to do any longer term recovery planning. However, part of the responsibility of the senior leadership team in Jackson, MS is to begin the planning and they have done so.

A number of colleges and universities in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama have been closed due to Hurricane Katrina. Some of them will not open again this fall—some might not open again this year. Students enrolled at these institutions will lose at least a semester of study and some within reach of completing a degree will not be able to complete programs. Innovative educational alternatives for these students and their institutions must be identified—quickly. Some of those alternatives will involve relocating students to other campuses in the region. Another alternative is to bring online learning to those students impacted by Katrina. There is a clear role for ALN to serve these students that cannot be served by other measures. Specifically, ALN, through the combined efforts of Sloan-C and its member colleges and universities and the Southern Regional Education Board's Electronic Campus, can create an academic "pipeline" to help serve students who have returned or moved to other parts of the country due to the disaster. The proposed initiative would provide online education that will enable their learning to continue over the next several months.

Sloan-C institutions that currently provide ALN degree programs have the experience to respond on a national scale to address this crisis. Based on our initial surveys, faculty at Sloan-C institutions want to volunteer to provide assistance. We are proposing the following:

- The Sloan Foundation would partner with the Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB) and with the Sloan Consortium (Sloan-C) to launch a multi-pronged approach to serving the educational needs of students enrolled at impacted institutions.
- SREB will work with state leadership to develop list of impacted institutions that currently are unable to serve their own students.
- SREB would take the lead role in working with state government and presidents of universities to promote awareness of this initiative.
- SREB would coordinate with provosts to develop a list of most critically needed courses –note that courses are considered the core element here (not full degree programs), since disaster victims will be seeking courses, not programs.
- Sloan-C will solicit institutions from its membership that desire to participate in this initiative by offering ALN courses to victims of the Katrina disaster.
- Sloan-C institutions would offer to teach additional ALN courses during an accelerated fall semester, which would begin on Monday, 8 October 2005, and end eight-weeks later in mid-December. These institutions would list their courses in a special Sloan-C catalog.
- Sloan-C would create an online catalog listing of these courses and make the catalog available on the Sloan-C website and linked from the SREB website. Institutional leaders would be invited to contribute ALN courses to the catalog.

- SREB would maintain a database of students from the impacted institutions, in order restrict the initiative just to these students. SREB’s Visiting Electronic Student Authorization (VESA) could be deployed to assist institutions and students in streamlining admission/registration efforts.
- Students could enroll in any course offered from Sloan-C institutions in the catalog. This catalog will be placed on the Sloan-C site. There will be a place for institutions to list the courses that they will provide and a link to a description and/or course syllabus. A search engine would be added. The idea would be to provide a searchable listing of courses that Sloan-C institutions have agreed to offer under the disaster relief program. The catalog will be searchable by institution, as well. If there is sufficient preparation time, we can add listings that compare institutions (Doctoral I, etc.). This can be done using USN&WR listings or IPEDs data.
- The Sloan Foundation would provide a grant to Sloan-C (SCOLE at Olin College), in order to subsidize the cost of offering these additional courses sections. This subsidy would be in the form of a block grant to each providing institution, based on the number of course sections taught.
- Sloan-C institutions participating in this initiative also will be asked to provide access to Internet technologies for faculty from impacted institutions, so that those who had access to the Internet could interact with their students. For example, faculty could “podcast” lectures [even recording with audio tapes] to their students.

The publicity generated by this initiative will have direct positive benefit to the Sloan Foundation and to all of the participating institutions. It also will do much to advance awareness of ALN among the general public. It is not inconceivable that other foundations will want to contribute to this, or that there could be a national fund-raising campaign to support this initiative (every website now has a “Contribute to Katrina Relief” link). There also could be a fund-raising initiative targeted to alumni of impacted institutions. The Sloan-C website could also create a place for people to contribute to the program.

Overall, this initiative is designed to serve students that have been impacted by the Katrina disaster. It will serve to keep them advancing in the educational pipeline until they can return to their home institutions. In some way, it will help to restore normalcy to the lives of those students impacted so severely by this disaster. It is about serving the thousands of impacted students, until their own institutions are able to welcome them back.

This proposal has been prepared in less than one day; it was begun once the magnitude of the Katrina disaster was known. Please note that there is another layer of detail underlying the general proposal. For example, SREB will work to cut through the red tape involved and make this happen. We will encourage institutions participating in this program to have their campus bookstores work with publishers to donate textbooks to students participating in the initiative. The SREB will work with impacted institutions to ensure that credits earned in this initiative will transfer. Other ideas will be developed as we continue to move forward with the initiative.

**Budget:**

\$2,500 blanket grant per course section, 400 course sections	\$1,000,000
[25 students in each section, meaning 10,000 course enrollments]	

Note that an institution having a modest tuition rate of \$200 per credit hour would normally generate \$200/credit hour x 3 credit hours x 25 students, or \$15,000 in tuition (plus any fees). So the grant of \$2,500 per course would essentially mean that the Sloan Foundation funding would be leveraged by a factor of at least five by the contributions from the institutions. The assumption in this proposal is that the \$2,500 would be used as a stipend paid to the instructor teaching the course—that is, all of the funding from the Sloan Foundation ultimately would go to faculty, not to institutions.

The SREB will contribute time of key personnel (e.g., Bruce Chaloux) for coordination of this initiative. The University of Illinois will contribute time for Burks Oakley to assist with this project for the fall semester. Sloan-C will use its contingency fund to develop the catalog and purchase mailing lists for notification of Presidents and Provosts.

### **About SREB**

The Southern Regional Education Board ([www.sreb.org](http://www.sreb.org)), headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia, was created in 1948 by Southern governors and legislatures to help leaders in education and government work cooperatively to advance education and improve the social and economic life of the region. It provides a variety of services to its member states and seeks to find ways to share resources and to enable states to achieve together educational programs and improvements that would be impossible or financially impractical for a single state. SREB is governed by a Board that consists of the governor of each member state and four people that he or she appoints, including at least one state legislator and at least one educator. SREB is a nonprofit, nonpolitical organization. It is supported by appropriations from its member states and by funds from private companies, foundations, and state and federal agencies.

SREB's sixteen member states are Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia.

## **XXI. APPENDIX C**

### **Rules and Responsibilities for Participation in Sloan Semester**

Providing Institutions refers to colleges and universities offering courses in Sloan Semester. Impacted Institutions refers to colleges and universities from Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi disrupted by Hurricane Katrina.

#### **Colleges and Universities**

1. Providing institutions must be regionally accredited.
2. Providing institutions must be or become members of Sloan-C (free registration available on Sloan-C web site).
3. Providing institutions must be authorized to participate in Sloan Semester by the Sloan Semester Steering Committee.
4. Courses listed in the Sloan Semester catalog must commence on or after October 10, 2005 and conclude by January 6, 2006. Providing institutions may develop their own course schedules within those start and end dates. However, the recommended schedule is an eight-week accelerated semester, starting on October 10.
5. All courses offered by providing institutions must carry regular academic credit and the credits recognized as degree credit.
6. Providing institutions agree that students enrolling in courses listed in Sloan Semester will not be charged any tuition or fees, including technology or connection fees, for enrolling in courses with the exception of required textbooks and course materials.
7. Students will not be required to be admitted to providing institution but cleared to register as a "guest matriculant" or "transient student."
8. Providing institutions agree to accept the Southern Regional Education Board's Visiting Electronic Student Authorization (VESA) that students will complete as the "application" for Sloan Semester

(see VESA description and the VESA data elements). VESA will establish student authorization to register for courses at providing institutions

9. Providing institutions will make available a convenient and easy process for students to register for courses remotely.
10. Providing institutions agree to forward an official transcript to the student's home institution following submission of grades by faculty at no cost to the student.
11. All courses listed in Sloan Semester will be offered entirely online (largely asynchronously). Providing institutions will not require any on-campus or residential requirement for courses in Sloan Semester.
12. Courses approved and listed in Sloan Semester will be displayed in the SREB Electronic Campus course information format. Providing institutions will submit course information through a Web "back office" interface provided by SREB.
13. Providing institutions are encouraged to list in their course descriptions on the Sloan Semester website essential prerequisite requirements for any course in Sloan Semester (part of the SREB format).
14. Providing institutions agree to offer any course that has a minimum of 3 students enrolled by the start date of the course. Sloan-C reserves the right to combine or collapse courses/sections to accommodate students.
15. Providing institutions and Sloan-C may agree to allow courses with fewer than 3 enrollments to be offered when individual student circumstances dictate.
16. While courses listed in the Sloan Semester catalog are primarily targeted at students from impacted institutions in Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi, providing institutions may enroll "native" students or others not from impacted institutions on a space available basis. Priority, however, will be given to those students targeted for Sloan Semester and at least 50% of "seats" established must be held until the registration deadline. Providing institutions may apply their regular policies and procedures for admission, tuition and fees, etc. for "native" students or others who are permitted to enroll.
17. Providing institutions will receive a stipend from Sloan-C based for any course that meets the minimum enrollment threshold. The enrollment scale applies only to students participating in Sloan Semester. Stipends will be allocated according to the following scale:
  - 3–5 enrollments — \$1000
  - 6–10 enrollments — \$1500
  - 11 or more enrollments — \$2500Stipends will be based upon students enrolled in a course on fifth day following the established start day of the course.
18. All academic policies and procedures of the providing institution, including course requirements, grading guidelines, and administrative procedures with the exception of those adopted by Sloan-C and agreed upon by providing institutions for Sloan Semester, will govern student participation.
19. Providing institutions agree to make available without cost all regular online resources and services to participating students, including access to online library resources and services, course or learning management systems, etc.
20. Providing institutions will establish an information page and link to it for Sloan Semester students to facilitate student registration.
21. Providing institutions will notify Sloan-C when the course is full and no additional students can be registered. Closed courses will be so designated on the Sloan Semester catalog.

22. Providing institutions will forward to Sloan-C confirmation of student registration and course completion data at dates to be determined.
23. Providing institutions and Sloan-C may amend these policies and procedures to meet any special cases or circumstances or to accommodate and meet the needs of students.
24. Institutions listing courses in the Sloan Semester catalog must agree that they will abide by the Rules and Responsibilities for Participation in the Sloan Semester. The Sloan Consortium agrees to provide the institution with the designated stipend amount for each course offered based upon verification of the number of Sloan Semester students enrolled at the official census date of five days into the accelerated semester.
25. Institutions that are unable to conform to the policies and procedures outlined for participation in Sloan Semester (e.g. those institutions unable to waive tuition and fees or that have calendars that do not fit with the Sloan Semester calendar) will be listed as under “Online Alternatives to Sloan Semester” on the web site (with their consent). These courses will not be eligible for Sloan C stipend awards.

### **Students**

1. Eligibility for the Sloan Semester will be limited to students matriculated for the Fall Term at institutions in Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi designated by those states as “impacted institutions.”
2. Students may enroll in up to 12 credit hours (semester) or the equivalent in Sloan Semester.
3. Students may take courses from multiple providing institutions.
4. Students must complete and submit the online SREB VESA application to participate and to be authorized to register/enroll in courses at providing institutions. VESA will serve as a “passport” to enrollment at participating institutions.
5. Students will be required to meet all prerequisite requirements of providing institutions.

### **Sloan-C Responsibilities**

1. Sloan-C will establish procedures for the review and approval of institutions and courses to be offered in Sloan Semester.
2. Sloan-C will authorize/approve the institutions and courses to be listed in the Sloan Semester catalog.
3. Sloan-C will process payments to providing institutions.
4. Sloan-C will provide access to a Call Center for interested students.

### **SREB Responsibilities**

1. SREB will host all courses on the Electronic Campus in a special section to be developed for Sloan Semester. Students will be able to access the site from the Sloan Semester site, Electronic Campus, and from providing institutions.
2. SREB will determine with state leadership in Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi those institutions designated as impacted institutions whose students will be eligible for Sloan Semester.
3. SREB and impacted institutions will establish a procedure for verifying student eligibility.
4. SREB will collect student information using VESA and will forward this information, electronically or by fax, to providing institutions along with the course(s) the students have indicated an interest in enrolling in.
5. SREB will provide access to its “back office” to those providing institutions approved by Sloan-C and will use its existing protocols to authorize access.

6. SREB will make available its course format and search features in the Sloan Semester site within the Electronic Campus.

### **How the Sloan Semester Will Work**

1. Students from impacted institutions will find their way to the Sloan Semester site hosted by Sloan-C ([www.sloansemester.org](http://www.sloansemester.org)) for general information about the program.
2. Students can click on “Review Available Courses” from the Sloan Semester site and will be transferred to the Sloan Semester page on the Electronic Campus (Sloan Semester EC).
3. Students will establish an account on the Sloan Semester EC (this is free and will auto-populate the VESA application downstream).
4. Students will be able to search the catalog by discipline, institution, level on Sloan Semester EC.
5. Students will locate the course(s) they wish to take and post those upon completion of the VESA application
6. Students will complete the VESA application and submit it (auto-populated from registration/profile information completed earlier) automatically submitted upon hitting submit button)
7. SREB will be notified of the submission at the time the student hits the submit button. Confirmation of receipt will be sent to the student (automatically generated)
8. SREB will verify VESA is complete and will confirm with impacted institutions that the student is a matriculated student at that institution (procedures to be developed).
9. SREB will forward VESA information, including contact information for the student and the courses the student has indicated an interest in taking, to providing institutions. Providing institutions will establish the necessary student record from VESA and contact student about registration/enrollment process.
10. Participating institutions will forward confirmation of registration to Sloan-C (process to be determined).

### **Procedures Governing Listing of Online Courses in Sloan Semester Catalog**

Colleges and universities will be notified of the approval to participate in Sloan Semester (henceforth called “providing institutions”) by September 11<sup>th</sup> and may begin the process of entering courses into the online catalog after that. The procedures follow.

1. Institutions will be notified by the Sloan Semester Steering Committee (SSSC) of their selection as a providing institution. This will signal authorization to list courses in the Sloan Semester catalog.
2. Providing institutions will establish a single contact person (name, telephone number and email address) to coordinate Sloan Semester activities. This person will work directly with SREB staff on all matters related to course entry in the Sloan Semester catalog.
3. After a contact person has been designated, SREB, the host of the Sloan Semester catalog, will begin direct communications with the institutional contact person. An account will be established for the institution to the Course Data Entry (CDE) system, a Web-based “back office” interface needed to input course information into the catalog. Instructions for using the CDE system and interface also will be provided. (While multiple persons at a providing institution may input course information, the contact person will manage/control the process and only one authorized id and password for each providing institution will be issued.)
4. The SSSC has set a limit of **15 courses** per providing institution. Institutions in multi-campus system, consortia or branch campuses will be considered as separate providing institutions. There is no minimum number of listings.

5. In the initial round of course entry (September 9-15) providing institutions may list up to **10 courses**. While institutions are “free” to list whatever courses they wish, the SSSC will provide general guidance about the disciplines, courses and level of offerings in which students have initially expressed interest. Courses may be offered at the undergraduate or graduate levels.
6. In the second round of course entry (September 16-23), the SSSC may ask providing institutions to list up to **5 additional courses** based up more specific course needs of students.
7. Finally, the SSSC will use “wildcards” to seek courses or sections of courses needed. This may include asking providing institutions to go beyond the 15 course cap.

The SSSC reserves the option of limiting certain courses (e.g. if providing institutions list multiple sections of the same course), asking providing institutions to reduce or consolidate courses, or otherwise taking steps to ensure the most robust and responsive catalog for students. No action will be taken without consultation with providing institutions.