

**SERVING K–12 IN SOUTH DAKOTA VIA DISTANCE:
NORTHERN STATE UNIVERSITY’S CENTER FOR STATEWIDE E-LEARNING**

South Dakota is ensuring that all students in the state have access to a college preparatory curriculum by offering advanced high school courses via distance delivery to small high schools throughout the state. The program is run by Northern State University’s (NSU) Center for Statewide E-learning. The idea behind the program is that small schools in the state might not have the resources to offer the advanced courses needed to help students be competitive in college, so the state has created a centralized way of providing those courses to all students regardless of the size or location of their high school.¹ The school districts sign up to participate in classes, and then determine student eligibility for participation.²

The Center for Statewide E-learning, which was originally proposed by Governor Bill Janklow, operates with 18 staff members and is funded by the state.³ It has been in operation since 2001.⁴ The distance courses are offered tuition-free. However, there are some costs to the districts, such as providing textbooks, computers, and an onsite adult facilitator.⁵

NSU has hired nine highly talented “master teachers” who have experience in K–12 classrooms and now work for the university to deliver their courses via distance education.⁶ The courses offered range from AP Physics to French and Shakespeare.⁷ In 2005–06, 39 courses were taught daily in 13 subjects.⁸ The program targets “college-bound” high school students to prepare them for college and to help students access the courses they must take to become eligible for the South Dakota Opportunity Scholarship, which is a \$5,000 scholarship awarded to South Dakota high school graduates who qualify academically by meeting standards such as completing the rigorous Regents Scholar curriculum and performing well on the ACT or SAT.⁹

¹ Phone Interview with Tad Perry, July 5, 2006. Conducted by Lara K. Couturier.

² Email from Tallman, Erika [tallmane@northern.edu] to lara_couturier@brown.edu. “Re: Evaluations of the Center,” July 24, 2006.

³ “Regents Approve E-learning Minor for Northern State.” *Edupage*, Feb. 22, 2002. Accessed July 6, 2006, <http://listserv.educause.edu/cgi-bin/wa.exe?A2=ind0202&L=edupage&T=0&O=A&F=&S=&P=859>.

⁴ “NSU Center for Statewide E-learning.” Northern State University Student Handbook. Accessed July 6, 2006, http://www.northern.edu/student_handbook/elearning.html.

⁵ “NSU Center for Statewide E-learning High School Policies.” Northern State University Center for Statewide E-learning. Accessed July 6, 2006, www.northern.edu/elearning/k12/policies.html.

⁶ “Personnel.” Northern State University Center for Statewide E-learning. Accessed July 6, 2006, www.northern.edu/elearning/k12/personnel.html.

⁷ “K-12 Course Information.” Northern State University Center for Statewide E-learning. Accessed July 6, 2006, www.northern.edu/elearning/k12/courses.html.

⁸ NSU Center for Statewide E-Learning. *Summary Report*, Fall 2005.

⁹ “NSU Center for Statewide E-learning High School Policies.” Northern State University Center for Statewide E-learning. Accessed July 6, 2006, www.northern.edu/elearning/k12/policies.html; Phone Interview with Tad Perry, July 5, 2006. Conducted by Lara K. Couturier; South Dakota Opportunity Scholarship: Frequently Asked Questions.” Pierre, SD: South Dakota Board of Regents. Accessed July 6, 2006, <http://www.sdbor.edu/documents/OpportunitySchoFAQ.pdf>.

NSU's Center for Statewide E-learning meets its mission of serving "all levels of South Dakota's educational system" by also:

- Integrating e-learning into undergraduate programs, including offering an 18-credit hour minor.
- Encouraging the use of instructional technologies in the teacher education program at Northern State. The idea is that teachers in small rural districts are going to need to use distance education to satisfy the needs of their students; teacher fluency with instructional technologies will help to ensure that students in rural areas are able to gain access to a broader array of courses.¹⁰
- Offering e-learning graduate programs such as the Master's of Science in Education in E-learning Design and Instruction and the Master of Science in E-Learning Technology and Administration, as well as a variety of certificate programs.

The Center employs a number of methods for monitoring and ensuring quality, including annual staff evaluations and anonymous student evaluations. In addition, in 2005–06 the Center began administering exams before and after the courses to measure what students learned from the course (results are not yet available).

The Center is reaching a high proportion of the state's schools. Between 2001 and 2005, 86 percent of South Dakota's 168 public school districts participated in one of the Center's offerings (including special events and student teaching in rural high schools). In 2005–06, 77 school districts were receiving high school courses on a daily basis. The number of students enrolled in courses has grown from 296 in 2001–02 to 797 in 2005–06.¹¹

Students complete and pass the Center's courses at a high rate. Between 2002 and 2005, overall student completion of courses was between 84 percent and 86 percent, and 98 percent of course completers passed the course.¹²

FURTHER INFORMATION

www.northern.edu/elearning/

¹⁰ National Governors Association. *The State of E-Learning in the States*. Washington, DC: National Governors Association, 2001, Page 15. Accessed July 21, 2006, <http://www.nga.org/cda/files/060601ELEARNING.pdf>.

¹¹ NSU Center for Statewide E-Learning. *Summary Report*, Fall 2005.

¹² Email from Tallman, Erika [tallmane@northern.edu] to lara_couturier@brown.edu. "Re: Evaluations of the Center," July 24, 2006.