October 30, 2012

Members of the NSHE Community

Dear Colleagues:

I am writing to share with you news related to the progress of a study I have commissioned on the current state and future possibilities for NSHE’s eLearning programs, and to ask for your help. As you may know, in August, NSHE contracted with Richard N. Katz & Associates, Inc. to look at what we were doing with our eLearning programs, to reconcile what they learn with what they know about best practices in higher education, and to recommend to me and the Board of Regents investments and approaches we might consider to better serve Nevadans through these instructional methods and technologies. Richard has more than 30 years of senior experience in higher education, served 14 years as Vice President of EDUCAUSE, and has advised more than two dozen college and university clients in the past two years. His colleagues are all senior university leaders and include Bob Albrecht, Chancellor Emeritus of Western Governors University.

Several factors went into my decision to commission this study. First, is the impending change to our state funding model. These changes will reduce funding for eLearning courses by eliminating the funding premium they have historically enjoyed. Second, NSHE needs to develop new online strategies that reflect the emergence of MOOCs – massive open online courses. Millions of students worldwide – including some here on our campuses – are enrolling in MOOCs. Universities and university systems like the University of Texas System are joining consortia like EdX, Coursera, Udacity, and others. I am not clear on how MOOCs might contribute to our academic programs, to affordability, or to access, but I do know that we cannot put our heads in the sand. Third, it is increasingly clear to me that eLearning has become mature. By all measures, students have embraced online modes of instruction and innovations such as course redesign and lecture flipping are becoming increasingly commonplace features on the academic landscape. Fourth, and most consequentially, is the NSHE budget. Like so many public institutions, we have had to shoulder – along with our students and their parents – a considerably greater portion of the costs of an NSHE education. We have withstood and overcome the challenges of the past four years. My great hope is that adversity has made us wiser and stronger. I hope too that a fresh look at eLearning and in particular at how we can work more collaboratively across NSHE will enhance our ability to serve more Nevadans and to improve the success of our students. I will explore any avenue to open NSHE’s doors to more Nevadans, to contribute to the economic welfare of this State and our citizens, and to help every student meet or surpass their academic goals. ELearning is only one facet of this challenge, but I think it’s an important one.

I understand that there are many rumors floating on campuses that this project will destroy the substantial work that all faculty have already done to provide distance learning and online courses for our students. Let me assure you that nothing could be further from the truth. Whatever the recommendations are from our consultants, I have informed them that I expect them to build on what we have already accomplished through the hard work and dedication of our faculty, not to destroy the good work we have already done.

So I write to inform you, and to ask for your help. Already, more than 300 of you have spoken with Richard and members of his team. I encourage you to make time for them, to share with them your frank opinions, and to join them in envisioning and engineering new possibilities for NSHE. Please help me make this project a success that we can all embrace and use to help carry us forward to meet the new challenges we face.

If you have questions, concerns, or advice to offer, please let Jane (jane\_nichols@nshe.nevada.edu) or Richard (richard.n.katz@gmail.com) know.

Help us build a new Nevada with a new look at how we deliver higher education.

Sincerely,



Daniel J. Klaich

Chancellor