

AMERICAN  
SENTINEL  
UNIVERSITY



AMERICAN SENTINEL UNIVERSITY  
2009 ANNUAL REPORT

QUALITY



## A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR AMERICAN SENTINEL UNIVERSITY BOARD OF TRUST

One of the consistent and persistent truths that emerged from the quality movement in this country is that: ***Quality is a journey, not a destination.***

The quality journey is a fact of life at American Sentinel University. Everyday, in every part of the university, the Board of Trust, faculty, and staff are working diligently to improve all facets of the school. As Chair of the Board of Trust for some five years, I see evidence of the progress of that journey demonstrated on a daily, weekly, monthly and annual basis – and now, for half a decade.

This report captures the highlights of that journey in 2009. Space does not permit a recitation of every quality improvement made at the school last year – there are just too many. Suffice it to say that I have reviewed quality initiatives large and small, and while the large ones are the easiest to describe, the small ones add up to a school rich in overall quality. A key quality measure for us is the continued strong levels of satisfaction of our students. That, combined with the growing persistence of our students toward graduation, are all we really need to know to confirm that our journey, while never complete, is well underway in fulfilling the mission of the school ***“to provide high-quality, innovative degree and certificate programs that enable students to enhance their professional and civic lives.”***

After reading this, our fourth Annual Report, I know you will agree.

**Dr. Kenneth McLennan**  
Chair, Board of Trust  
American Sentinel University

# STUDENT MANIFESTO

## We Nurture Talent

We believe nurturing the talent of American Sentinel University students and alumni is our most important responsibility.

We further believe the only true measure of our success is our students' success in their chosen fields of endeavor.

To achieve our goals, we pledge to our students that we will, to the best of our ability:

- Offer the highest quality educational content available anywhere in the world;
- Provide a response to student requests in no longer than 24 hours;
- Create a constant variety of innovative courses and programs that provide students with real choice in the latest and most desired best practice knowledge demanded in the marketplace;
- Employ the most innovative educational technologies;
- Provide world class student services; and
- Operate in a fiscally responsible manner to ensure students receive the best value tuition.

Finally, we pledge to annually provide students with the facts that demonstrate our progress in meeting our goals.

# MISSION, VISION AND VALUES

## MISSION STATEMENT

American Sentinel University's mission is to provide high-quality, innovative degree and certificate programs that enable students to enhance their professional and civic lives.

## VISION STATEMENT

*To be recognized as a world leader ...*

- ... for providing accessible, quality, advanced education for the motivated, non-traditional learner/professional who seeks to lead in emerging industries or growing market sectors of the global economy...
- ... for providing new levels of access to motivated, non-traditional students who here-to-fore have not had the opportunity for advanced professional degrees for reasons of time, money, or geography...
- ... for innovative use of technology that creates new standards in assessment and achievement of academic excellence...
- ... for understanding and meeting the changing needs of its students, communities, and other constituents...
- ... for creating excellence in student and constituent services.

## VALUES

American Sentinel University's institutional objectives are reflected in its values.

### *Continued Improvements in Quality Outcomes*

We place the creation of value for the learner at the center of all that we do.

We embrace the change necessary to continually improve our standards and processes to create "best in class" educational content and learning assessments.

### *Community Inclusiveness*

We act with integrity and behave ethically and transparently.

We value diversity among our Board, administrators, students, faculty and all other constituents and stakeholders.

We maintain a workplace characterized by safety, openness, creativity, challenge and innovation.

### *Universal Connectivity of Scholars*

We keep our students, faculty, staff, communities and other constituents fully informed and engaged in a free exchange of ideas in an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect.

We seek to identify the special service needs of our students and work diligently to meet or exceed them.

# IMPROVED CURRICULUM AND SERVICES BRING SATISFACTION TO STUDENTS

By Mary A. Adams, President



A June, 2009 study by independent researchers commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education found that “students who took all or part of [a] class online performed better, on average, than those taking the same course through traditional face-to-face instruction.”

We at American Sentinel see proof of this every day. Our students are succeeding in their studies, and our studies show that they are extremely satisfied with the quality of education and amount of support American Sentinel provides. In fact, students, faculty and staff working closely together in 2009 resulted in more student progress in completing courses and degree programs than at any time in our history.

In fact, here is an email I received recently from a student:

*“ASU has been my avenue to getting selected for an Air Force commission as a communications officer. I was selected over Ivy Leaguers, Olympians, etc... It was the most competitive selection board in AF history. I would be happy to champion my valued experience at this fine institution, and to serve as an example of your student body.”*

*– Mike Holloway (MIS)*

## IMPROVING STUDENT SATISFACTION

One of the things we hold most sacred at American Sentinel is the satisfaction of our students. Our commitment is enshrined in our student manifesto, “We Nurture Talent.” It is reproduced on the previous page, but more importantly, is found in every office at American Sentinel University.


We survey our students every quarter and publish the results in our student newsletter, *The Sentinel*. Look for this year’s results at the end of this report. I will say that, while we are not perfect, student responses indicate that American Sentinel performs at a high level of satisfaction in most everything we do.

## IMPROVING LEARNING

In 2008-2009, American Sentinel commenced a series of self-study exercises required by three accreditation processes. These internal examinations helped us confirm that our platform – the online format of our courses, student discussion boards, interactive communications between students and faculty, the MyCampus chat rooms – provide for robust, structured interactive learning.

Our truly interactive approach to online education is an important differentiator for American Sentinel. It is also a significant advantage in our various accreditation processes. In 2009, American Sentinel was deeply involved in three such processes:

- preparation of our five-year reaccreditation by the Distance Education & Training Council (DETC), which will take place later in 2010;
- self-study for regional accreditation with the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), again for 2010;
- and the successful completion of the accreditation of our nursing programs by the Commission on College of Nursing Education (CCNE).



The self-studies focused faculty and administrators' attention on the latest developments and best practices in online teaching. One of the outcomes of this research led us to increase the use of formal discussions in the online forums. Also, we are increasing our guidance to students about contemporary Web resources that facilitate application of academic knowledge to real-world experiences.

The self-study also helped us pinpoint curriculum updates, policies and services that we believe improve our stature as a university and also help smooth internal processes.

## IMPROVED CURRICULUM

To stay relevant in our curriculum, we needed to add specializations to certain degree programs whose industries offer greater job opportunities for our students. New general education courses in Psychology, Sociology, Philosophy, and Statistics help broaden students' scope.

Great effort went into making the revisions to these programs. For instance, reports indicate that more military members are enrolling in Human Resources degree programs to prepare for increasing levels of responsibility within the service or in post-military careers. To keep up with this demand, American Sentinel added a Human Resource Management specialization to our BS Business Administration degree, which has been accepted into the AU-ABC program. Now, airmen and -women who have completed the CCAF Human Resource Management Associates degree can transfer a minimum of 60 semester hours if they enroll in this program.

Other BSBA specializations updated in 2009 include:

- **Healthcare Management**

This program teaches students to apply principles of finance to complex healthcare budgeting and forecasting, articulate regulatory impact on organizational decision-making, and assess key risks in a healthcare organization.

- **Finance**

This program focuses on accounting and financial strategies necessary to develop strategies to ensure the financial viability and growth of an organization. Courses include the use of simulation software to evaluate critical financial and business risk threats.

- **Business Informatics**

This program teaches management of key information systems and how to use data for organizational decision-making. Students gain a working knowledge of databases, enterprise information, and security systems.

- **Leadership**

This program provides skills needed to integrate management, marketing, accounting, and finance concepts for developing strategies to improve short-, medium-, and long-term organizational performance.

Healthcare is one of the strongest job-producing fields, predicted to generate 3.2 million new wage and salary jobs through 2018, which is more than any other industry. To that end, we broadened and improved our healthcare curriculum in 2009 by updating the following degree programs, including an additional specialization to the Master of Science-Nursing:

- **Bachelor's Degree in Health Informatics** (*replaces Health Systems Management*)  
This program provides training in information analysis, solution design and the management of data storage, transfer and retrieval in health care environments. The program includes five courses that serve as the foundation for the Certified Health Data Analyst (CHDA) certificate.
- **Registered Nurse to Master's Degree in Nursing**  
We were able to provide a bridge program combining our RN to BSN and MSN programs to offer a direct-entry RN to MSN program, which was approved by DETC and CCNE. This program allows a Registered Nurse (RN) with an Associate Degree in Nursing and at least two years of experience to earn a Master of Science in Nursing degree without earning a baccalaureate degree.
- **Master's Degree in Nursing – Nursing Management and Organizational Leadership**  
This program prepares nurses to be leaders, managers, and administrators in roles that involve resource management, interdisciplinary collaboration, and application of technology, information systems, knowledge, and critical thinking.
- **Master's Degree in Nursing – Nursing Education**  
This specialization prepares experienced nurses for educator roles within the clinical environment or to become a faculty member in both traditional and non-traditional schools of nursing, with an emphasis on curriculum development, learning styles and distance education.
- **Master's Degree in Nursing – Case and Quality Management**  
This specialization prepares nurses to assume the role of case manager within a health system or insurance industry by building on the standards of the Case Management Society of America core curriculum, with additional emphasis on distance client management using technology.
- **Master's Degree in Nursing – Nursing Informatics**  
The program specialization prepares experienced nurses to manage health information systems critical to the mission of health care delivery systems, including clinical and administrative systems, data management and data mining, and information systems project management.
- **Master's Degree in Nursing – Infection Prevention and Control**  
This specialization provides relevant education in two emerging, but significant fields in American healthcare: patient safety and quality control for hospital-acquired infections, and the growing threat of epidemics.

## IMPROVED STUDENT SERVICES

- **Retention**

Because student retention continues to be a primary focus for American Sentinel, we launched a new email campaign revolving around student persistence. Students who appear to be falling behind in their coursework will receive email messages providing reminders and encouragement to get back on schedule or ask for help.

- **Broadened Communities**

American Sentinel's MyCampus provides opportunities for students to start or join communities of interest that can focus on their program, their careers, or other areas of common interest. Support from others in similar situations can mean the difference between success and failure.

- **24/7 Librarian Service**

A new virtual reference service is available to students and faculty offering seven-day-a-week librarian and research services via email. The service helps students answer the question, "Where do I start?" to research and teaches them how to find resources.

Last but not least: technology. The rapid growth of the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) field globally prompted us to update the Bachelor of Science-Information Systems GIS specialization to a GIS degree program.

- **Bachelor's Degree in Geographic Information Systems (GIS)**

This program teaches students to interpret and visualize spatial data for the purpose of uncovering relationships, patterns and trends while covering fundamental business and information technology skills.

Additionally, faculty worked diligently to improve and update other long-standing degree program curricula. These updates were submitted to the DETC for review and were implemented in the fall. As described later in this report, program enhancements were made to:

- **Master of Science Computer Science**
- **Bachelor of Science Information Systems**
- **Bachelor of Science Information Technology**
- **Master of Business Administration**
- **Bachelor of Business Administration**



## IMPROVED POLICIES

The American Sentinel team works diligently to add and modify policies that we believe will enhance and structure our students' learning experience. Policy changes in 2009 include internet usage and nurse licensing requirements. Other significant policy modifications include:

- **Monthly Course Starts**

Course starts now occur monthly instead of twice a month. The intention of this change is to facilitate larger student cohorts and enhance the discussion forums.

- **Length of Courses**

All 12-week courses have been modified to eight weeks. All four-credit-hour courses have been modified to three.

- **Extensions Reduced to 14 Days**

To prevent cramming coursework for an eight-week class into four weeks or less, class extensions have been reduced to 14 days. Students must have 50 percent of the course completed, and requests can take place through the last day of class.

- **Class Participation Becomes Compulsory**

To improve critical thinking and enhance the learning experience, weekly class participation is now mandatory. Students have the flexibility to post comments anytime during the week, and they will be graded based on the quality of their posts.

All in all, 2009 was a year of growth and accomplishments for American Sentinel. Let me finish by saying: ***2010 will be even better! Stay tuned, and stay studying.***

*Mary A. Adams*

# ACCREDITATION IMPROVES OUR ABILITY TO ATTRACT STUDENTS

By Catherine Garner, DrPH, Provost and Dean, Health Sciences and Nursing



2009 was an extremely exciting and introspective year for American Sentinel because we dove into not one, not two, but three accreditation processes. Each one required intense self-analysis and meticulous documentation of our operations. But that didn't deter us. Achieving additional nationally respected accreditations will improve American Sentinel's position as a distinguished university and be all the more attractive to serious students.

Here's a status of the processes to date:

## CCNE ACCREDITATION

In March, American Sentinel hosted a site visit from the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE). Officially recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education as a national accreditation agency, CCNE is an autonomous accrediting agency contributing to the improvement of public health. CCNE ensures the quality and integrity of baccalaureate and graduate education programs that prepare effective nurses.

As a voluntary, self-regulatory process, CCNE accreditation supports and encourages continuing self-assessment by nursing education programs and the continuing improvement of collegiate education.

The accreditation process consisted of the following steps:

- **Self-study** – Addressed how American Sentinel meets CCNE accreditation standards.
- **Site visit** – An evaluation team visited the school to validate the findings of the self-study, determine if the program meets all accreditation standards, and discern any compliance issues. The evaluation team then prepared a report for us and for CCNE. (We met all of the required quality standards.)
- **Institutional Response** – Based on the results presented in the report, American Sentinel had the opportunity to respond to the evaluation report.
- **Review** – The self-study document, evaluation team report, and the school's response were reviewed by the Accreditation Review Committee (ARC), which makes a recommendation regarding accreditation to the Board.
- **Decision** – In October, the CCNE Board granted American Sentinel's nursing degree programs with a five-year full accreditation, based on the strength of our faculty and the quality of the curriculum.

This widely respected accreditation signifies that American Sentinel's nursing programs meet exacting national standards. It confirms that our mix of competency-based learning, clinical applications, real-world relevance, and flexible format prepare students well for healthcare careers. It's also extremely important for our students, because in many cases, employers won't reimburse or recognize a nursing degree without this accreditation.

The CCNE-accreditation isn't a distinguishing differentiator for just the school; it means the world to our students, too. Here's what one of them had to say:

*“I work for the Federal government, which recognizes degrees from nursing schools that are accredited by CCNE. Should I decide to work toward a DNP or a Ph.D., it will be necessary to have graduated from a school with CCNE accreditation.”*

*– Ann Marie Flory, Master of Science in Nursing student*

## DETC

American Sentinel, through its predecessor schools, was accredited in 2005 for five years. As with all DETC-accredited institutions, American Sentinel was required to apply for accreditation and demonstrate that it continues to meet the standards for accreditation. The application involved preparing a detailed self-study followed by an on-site review. In September, a group of six DETC reviewers and a staff observer conducted a site visit in Denver.

Two exciting outcomes resulted from this visit: first, the Chair of the review team made a point to comment on the professionalism of American Sentinel's staff and faculty and what a wonderful school we have. Second, they made a point to tell us how impressed they were with the high level of satisfaction indicated by American Sentinel students. This was based on the surveys returned and interviews with students randomly selected on the day of the site visit. We were extremely honored by these comments.

Official word on our reaccreditation is expected following the DETC June, 2010, Commission meeting.

## HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION

After nearly four years of planning and preparation, American Sentinel launched a momentous initiative in 2008 when we filed an application to seek regional accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. As one of the most highly regarded accrediting agencies, HLC requires painstaking evaluations of our school's mission, academics, quality of delivery, student support services, operations, processes and more.

The first step required more than a year of work and effort to write and submit an extensive application called a Preliminary Information Form (PIF). This PIF document was peer reviewed by academic evaluators from other HLC schools and the Commission. Following its acceptance, a visit was scheduled by a peer review team. In preparation for that visit (and the heart of the HLC evaluation) is an intensive self-study and comprehensive documentation of all facets of the school.

During all of 2009, the American Sentinel University Board of Trust, deans, faculty and university administrators formally observed, assessed and documented core aspects of our operations, ranging from organizational effectiveness to curriculum and academic excellence to student outcomes.

One unique element of the evaluation is that American Sentinel must solicit comments from the public about the quality of the institution or its academic programs. The HLC committee informed us that the letters received about American Sentinel were overwhelming in their positive commendations.

The all-important site visit will take place February 8-10, 2010, in Colorado.

## NEWS ABOUT NURSING

As Dean of Nursing and Health Sciences, I have to boast a bit about our Master's degree in nursing program.

Our MSN program was enhanced with some specialized infection prevention and control courses in response to a major health system's need to train as many as 200 nurses as infection control professionals. The health system would like try to prepare against two major trends in healthcare: patient safety and quality control for hospital-acquired infections, and the growing threat of epidemics and pandemics.

The issue of patient safety in healthcare settings has been at the forefront of healthcare issues for the past decade. It has prompted the Institute for Healthcare Improvement to establish a list of "never events," which are adverse events that should not happen within the hospital environment. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that there are approximately 2 million patients who acquire infections when they are hospitalized, resulting in 44,000 - 98,000 deaths and \$17 billion - \$29 billion in costs.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid has even issued guidelines that hospitals will no longer be reimbursed when a "never-event" happens, potentially jeopardizing millions in revenue for health systems.

Additionally, emerging epidemics are creating a need within health systems to have nursing personnel capable of tracking and coordinating community outbreaks. This requires specialized knowledge in epidemiology and surveillance of disease.

It's extremely important for major health systems to formally train infection control experts. Our program was developed using guidelines from The Certification Board for Infection Control and Epidemiology and the Quality and Safety Education for Nurses Guidelines, sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Also, in response to our faculty and advisors, we were able to provide a bridge program combining our RN to BSN and MSN programs to offer a direct-entry RN to MSN program, which was approved by DETC and CCNE . This program allows a Registered Nurse (RN) with an Associate Degree in Nursing and at least two years of experience to earn a Master of Science in Nursing degree without earning a baccalaureate degree.

The program allows a student to complete 18 credits of baccalaureate level nursing courses and three credits of Professional Communication. If the student achieves a 3.0 or higher in each of these courses, she or he can fill out a graduate application and apply to the MSN program. Students who are not able to achieve a 3.0 in each of the nursing courses, but do have a 2.5 cumulative GPA, are allowed to complete the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) sequence, then apply separately to the Master's Degree in Nursing program.

It's been a challenging and inspiring year, and I am so proud of the accomplishments made by the university in 2009. I salute our students, faculty and staff for putting forth such dedicated efforts and hard work that helped all of us succeed and grow this year.

*Catherine Garner*



# IMPROVING TECHNOLOGY IMPROVES STUDENT SUCCESS

By Anton Spraul, Assistant Professor for the Practice of Computer Science  
and Ray Fernandez, Assistant Professor for the Practice of Management

During our self-study, we consulted the relevant curricula guidelines from such organizations as the Association of Computing Machinery, the Association for Information Systems, and the Association of Information Technology Professionals as well as the curricula of competitors, input from industry experts, and feedback from faculty and current and former students.

We believe the resulting technology programs are more enticing for the prospective student, more likely to be completed by the enrolled student, and more relevant to the career of the graduate.

## Bachelor of Science-Computer Science

- The early programming course sequence has been replaced by a longer sequence, which takes the material at a more manageable pace and includes a new course on problem solving.
- CS220 was completely rewritten as CS221 with an updated text to better reflect current practices in software engineering.
- Course prerequisites were relaxed to reduce scheduling bottlenecks.

## Bachelor of Science Computer Science-Game Programming Specialization

- No program-specific structural changes were made, but most courses in the specialization were revised and updated for the new year.

## Bachelor of Science-Geographic Information Systems

- Several courses were updated to reduce reliance on a particular GIS solution, eliminating a software licensing issue.
- New courses in GPS and data systems integration extend the program into the developer sphere.
- Reflecting the extended GIS curriculum, this program was changed from a specialization of the information systems degree, to a full degree program.

## Bachelor of Science-Information Systems

- Several courses were retired, and new ones added in systems software, enterprise-level information systems, and process management. The revised program is more practical and better aligned with current industry practices.

## Bachelor of Science-Information Technology

- This program was updated to emphasize the goal of producing graduates who are expert users of information technology, capable of applying that expertise in typical business settings. To achieve this, several management courses were replaced by more advanced courses in database and enterprise systems, and the program's objectives were rewritten. The program is more clearly distinguished from our other technology degrees and fills an important niche for students who desire to work with information technology in a business setting outside of programming.

## Bachelor of Science-Management Information Systems

- Previously, this program was a minor variant on the information systems degree. The new curriculum has a greater emphasis on management. Six courses have been added in areas such as organizational behavior and human resource development. The revised curriculum better reflects the program objectives and should attract prospective students who did not find the expected management knowledge in the old curriculum.
- This program also incorporates the improvements to the information systems degree.

## Bachelor of Science-Web Design and Development

- This program was restructured to strengthen its focus. The number of credit hours required in the major was significantly increased, and students must now take 30 credit hours of courses specifically in web design and development. The updated program will produce graduates that are fluent, and not merely familiar, with all the technologies and skills that their future employers require.

## Master of Science-Computer Science

- The transition was completed from a single, fixed curriculum to a choice of three concentrations: computer networking, computer programming, and information systems security. The program should better prepare graduates for specific careers within the industry. It should also position the school to attract prospective students not served by a general computer science degree.
- Many of the existing courses were updated with new texts.

## Master of Science-Information Systems

- General management and marketing courses were removed from the required list and replaced with former elective courses, covering advanced topics in information systems. The resulting curriculum is more tightly focused and better supports the program's goal of producing graduates who will provide for all the information technology needs of an organization.

## IMPROVEMENTS TO CASPER

As our student body grew, our technology needed to evolve. The following improvements were made to Casper, the student information system, in 2009. The name Casper captures our fundamental approach to technology: it's friendly and transparent. Casper is also an acronym that stands for **C**onfucius, **A**ristotle, **S**ocrates, **P**lato, **E**instein and **R**umi. These historic educators' and philosophers' names are used for various databases and services. We adopted the use of these names because they remind us constantly of our most important mission: student learning.

- An automated email system was added to Casper making it possible to send personalized emails based on nearly any event or status within a student's record.
- Scanned documents can now be stored within Casper.
- New course plan functionality allows both staff and students to map out the schedule of courses that a student should take.
- Course prerequisite information is available to staff during the course registration process.
- A request tracking system was created to track fulfillment of student requests. It includes a basic workflow system.

- A new transcript format was created. Official transcript requests are now handled through Casper's request tracking system.
- An analytics module was added to Casper that allows staff to easily explore report data via a pivot table and linked chart.
- An improved course registration process for students asks for less information and checks for course prerequisites. Course registration requests are now handled through Casper's request tracking system.

## MORE ADVANCES

One of the key issues in the past was the number of student queries of the academic advisors regarding the use of Moodle and student sites that would have been answered had the student completed the orientation course. Starting in spring of 2009, all students were required to take the orientation course with the student academic advisors as the "faculty." Students have two weeks to complete orientation.

## IMPROVED STUDENT SATISFACTION

American Sentinel experienced increased satisfaction with our technology in 2009. This may be directly related to the orientation as well as the dramatic drop in routine IT questions for the student academic advisors.

KEY MEASURE	ACTION	JULY 09	ACTION	MARCH 09	OCT 08	JULY 08
Moodle as a platform	Encourage orientation courses	92.6%	Holding steady	91.7%	92.1%	92.2%
Satisfied with technology assistance when I want it	Continue to require orientation course, as support queries for Moodle are declining	94.6%	Require students to take orientation course which explains technology.	52.1%	59%	59.3%

# IMPROVING OUR PLACE IN CYBERSPACE

By Jeffrey Caplan, Dean, Strategic Enrollment Management



In 2009, American Sentinel took a deep dive into the swirling maelstrom of cyberspace.

We dramatically improved our current online marketing programs and launched a number of significant new ventures in the dynamic world of Web 2.0. We even tried a few things that didn't work out so well - but at least we tried! What we did do well was significantly increase our exposure to the online marketplace. We advertised, engaged and communicated with students, alumni, faculty and potential students through online vehicles where they consume information.

Our marketing efforts focused on three areas: improved online marketing, improved social marketing, and improved interactivity. The goal was to attract new students (our growing student population helps us keep our tuition among the lowest available anywhere), and communicate with current students and alumni, while building American Sentinel's reputation as a progressive online school in the digital environment. Additionally, we hope many of the skills we learn in this area will find their way into our courses and the student services we provide.

## IMPROVED ONLINE MARKETING

The ubiquitous Google along with Yahoo! and Bing search engines have revolutionized marketing by enabling consumers to navigate and control the messages they receive. That means marketers must think, act and speak the way consumers would in their quest to find desired services or products.

Audience measurement company comScore estimates more than 113 billion online searches were conducted globally through July 2009, up 41 percent compared to 2008. In 2009, American Sentinel stepped up its efforts to increase the university's presence in search results.

### ■ Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

We launched a Search Engine Optimization effort with a new marketing partner that increased the number of Web site visitors by improving our search results ranking when people search on education-related terms.

Our marketing partner assessed each of our degree programs and our key selling propositions to create a matrix of one-, two-, three- and four-word search terms, or keywords. As we developed copy and collateral throughout the year, such as Web content, press releases, and articles, we submitted the copy to our vendor for SEO review and enhancements.

By making our keywords prevalent in a variety of online formats, we have seen a marked improvement in American Sentinel's name and links appearing in search results. But SEO is a never-ending process that requires consistency and diligence, and it is extremely difficult to measure organic search. Still, SEO is an extremely cost-effective marketing tool, and as we continue to hone our efforts, the number of Web site visitors continues to increase.

### ■ Search Engine Marketing (SEM)

The big brother to SEO is SEM - Search Engine Marketing. The difference is that SEM encompasses a variety of paid search functionalities, such as pay-per-click and keyword bidding. SEM ensures sharper targeting and measurable results.

For instance, we worked with an SEM specialist to launch Google Web ad campaigns that deliver targeted ads based on a user's search results. Clicking on one of these ads takes the visitor to a specially coded landing page that provides more information on that particular marketing message. We can track the number of visitors to each landing page as well as any request-for-information forms submitted from that page.

SEM offers a precise way to measure the effectiveness of paid marketing efforts. But due to ever-changing search engine algorithms and the dynamic nature of the Internet, Search Engine Marketing requires constant care and feeding.

## IMPROVED SOCIAL MARKETING

No longer is it feasible for an organization to design marketing messages and push them out to the public. Today, marketers must meaningfully engage with their audiences, especially online. With the advent of Web 2.0, Internet activity advanced from the passive to the personal in the form of reviews, comments, blogs, Twitter tweets, Facebook posts and the like. The rise of online social activity compels marketers to create open-ended opportunities to interact with various audiences.

Social Media is no longer a marketing experiment: it's now a central component of any good marketing strategy. In 2009, American Sentinel introduced and continues to improve upon several social marketing initiatives.

### ■ Social Sites

In late summer, American Sentinel launched pages on four popular social communities, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and MySpace, as well as a blog on our Web site. These portals provide a platform for students, alumni, faculty and potential students to participate in discussions, share information, and to comment and network.

*Follow Mary Adams on Twitter at "MaryAdams711" or on American Sentinel's blog at "AmerSentinel."*

Because Web users have such short attention spans and a plethora of media from which to choose, they look for content that provides value. That means we must position American Sentinel as a provider of insightful, relevant information rather than blatant promotional messages. As Web 2.0 mandates, users want to be in control of the messages they receive; most do not seek out marketing messages, and they will quickly tune us out if our content is suspicious.

To that end, we post information to our social sites two to three times a week, including:

- Press releases
- News
- Announcements
- Relevant articles
- Topics for discussion
- Information about new programs, services and opportunities
- Industry information



We're still new at social media, but in the last half of 2009 we observed more than 6,000 'click-throughs' to our Website from LinkedIn and Facebook.

***Join the conversation! Visit American Sentinel's social sites:***

**Facebook:** <http://www.facebook.com/americansentineluniversity>  
**Twitter:** <http://twitter.com/amersentinel>  
**LinkedIn:** <http://tinyurl.com/ASULinkedPage>  
**MySpace:** <http://www.myspace.com/americansentineluniv>  
**ASU Blog:** <http://www.americansentinel.edu/blog/>

#### ■ LinkedIn

LinkedIn provides a platform for professionals to network and find career-specific information and discussions. American Sentinel has established LinkedIn profiles for two subject matter experts who, while representing themselves as affiliated with the university, disseminate unbiased, relevant and helpful career information aimed at their respective industries.

Lt. Col. Paul Capicik, Ret., U.S. Air Force, reaches out to military interests, and Catherine Garner, DrPH, Provost and Dean Health Sciences and Nursing, targets nursing and healthcare groups.

From September–December, for example, Paul's LinkedIn activity with the military community generated Website visits making it the 11th biggest driver of traffic to the American Sentinel site during that time.

Connect with our subject matter experts on LinkedIn:

**Catherine Garner:** <http://www.linkedin.com/in/catherinegarner>  
**Paul Capacik:** <http://www.linkedin.com/in/paulcapicik>

## IMPROVED INTERACTIVITY

#### ■ "Careers in..." – IT and Healthcare Article Series

With a two-fold aim of establishing American Sentinel as a provider of relevant information and engaging students, alumni, faculty and prospective students in a meaningful way, we developed two "Careers in..." article series that appeal to our top degree programs: Information Technology and Healthcare.

The "Careers in IT" series, created by Paul Capicik, is directed specifically to a military audience. The "Careers in Healthcare" series is written by Betty Nelson, Ph.D., RN, adjunct faculty who has more than 30 years experience as a clinician, administrator and educator, is targeted to nurses and healthcare workers. Both of these resident experts present objective advice on career-related topics, and they ask for audience feedback.

The articles are posted regularly on our blog and to our social media sites. Articles are also published on other relevant sites as a means of engaging a broader audience while establishing American Sentinel as a compelling thought leader. Additionally, articles are distributed to friends and followers of Paul Capacik and Catherine Garner through their respective LinkedIn accounts.

In line with the article series and LinkedIn profiles, American Sentinel began hosting Webinars (live, interactive, online presentations) on career topics. Paul Capicik conducted two Webinars to date, covering tips and guidance on careers in Information Technology.

The Webinars offer several opportunities to touch our audiences, through invitations, postings, the live event and Q&A sessions, and archiving on the American Sentinel Web site.

To read these articles, please visit:

**Careers in IT** [http://www.americansentinel.edu/blog/category/ask\\_lt\\_colonel\\_capicik/](http://www.americansentinel.edu/blog/category/ask_lt_colonel_capicik/)  
**Careers in Healthcare** <http://www.americansentinel.edu/blog/category/healthcare/>

#### ■ Partnerships and Outreach

We also increased our exposure via strategic partnerships with relevant organizations. One example is NurseTogether.com, which, in just three months, has published two of our Careers in Healthcare articles on its front page, where it receives 160,000 nurse visitors each month.

We also joined the National Rural Health Association (NRHA) as a Silver Sponsor. Instead of just pushing marketing messages out to this audience, we studied the demographics of its members who receive NRHA communications. Then we developed a “success story” campaign based on American Sentinel students who work in rural healthcare and who have helped improve their hospitals’ operations thanks to their course work. This kind of nurture-marketing takes time to develop relationships, trust and response.

**See our rural health blog:** <http://ruralhealthprofessionals.blogspot.com/>

We’re also beginning to establish partnerships with healthcare organizations. We are establishing relationships, attending education fairs and developing customized communications for their staff. We look forward to sharing our progress in next year’s annual report.

In addition to the Careers in IT series, we increased our communication efforts with military audiences, too. From attending education fairs at military bases and counseling American Sentinel students with special military needs, to participating in the MyCAA program for active duty spouses, we stepped up our military support to this very important American Sentinel constituent.

#### ■ New Video Library

Taking advantage of the latest trend in interactivity, we developed a series of short videos in which students, graduates and faculty share in their own words the benefits gained from their American Sentinel education experience. We posted these clips on YouTube, video sharing portals and the American Sentinel Web site as well as included thumbnails and links in several e-marketing campaigns to students, alumni and prospective students.

**View the new videos at**  
[http://www.americansentinel.edu/Student\\_Life/ASU\\_Video\\_Library.php](http://www.americansentinel.edu/Student_Life/ASU_Video_Library.php)

We’ve seen success in some of our strategies, and of course, we’ve tried some that failed. As we learn, nurture and grow from our foray into the worlds of social media and interactivity, students benefit in numerous ways from our efforts: through better services, the increasing value of the American Sentinel brand, and by keeping our costs down with more efficient and effective media.

*Jeffrey Caplan*

# ANNUAL REPORT STATISTICAL DATA

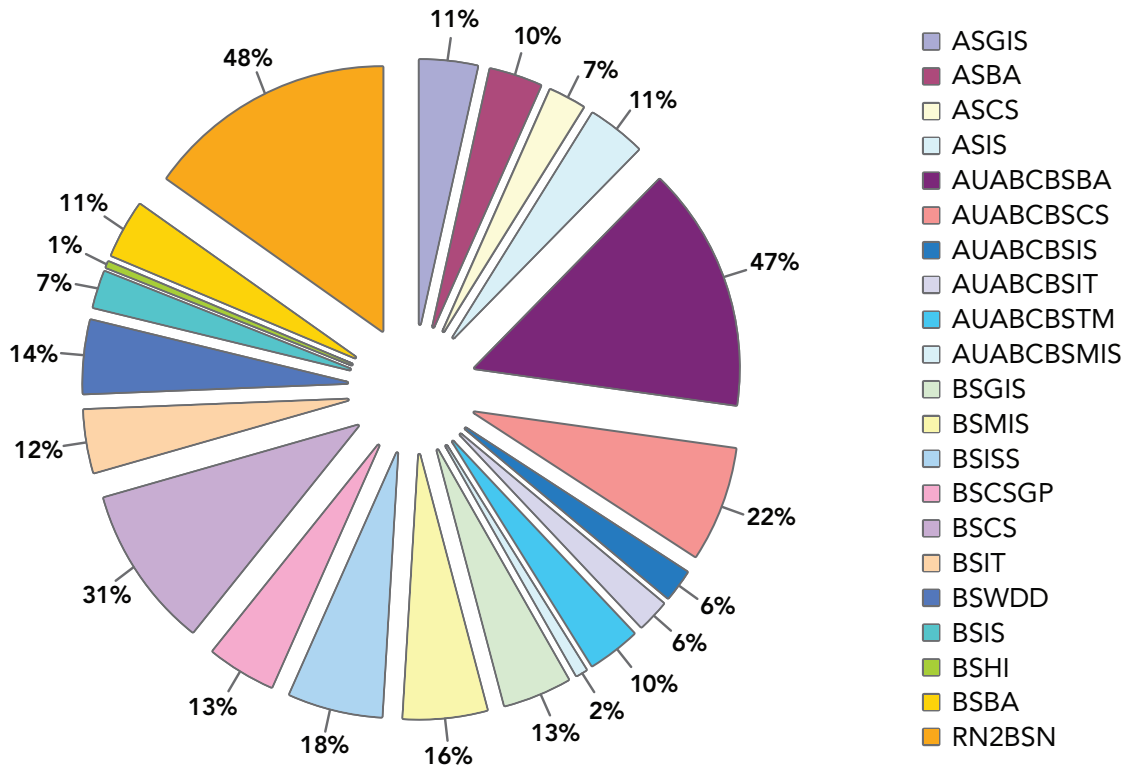
## LEVEL OF SATISFACTION

Student Satisfaction Response in the 10 most popular courses (highest number of enrollments):

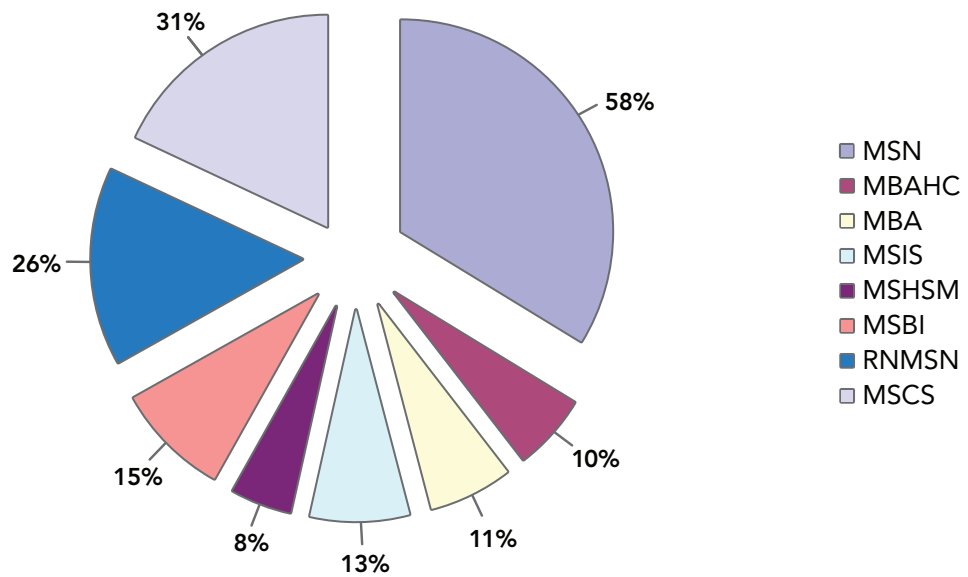
QUESTION	2006	2007	2008	2009
	% Answering Yes			
Did you or will you achieve upon completing your studies the goals you had when you started the course or program?	96.1%	96.4%	97.0%	97.4%
Would you recommend these studies to a friend?	93.7%	94.2%	92.0%	93.7%
All things considered were you satisfied with your studies with us?	97.6%	97.6%	96.0%	97.2%

# COURSE ENROLLMENT DATA

## UNDERGRADUATE ENROLLMENT RATES



## GRADUATE ENROLLMENT RATES



## COURSE COMPLETION DATA (TERMS)

### COURSE COMPLETION RATE

COURSE TYPE	2007	2008	2009
Undergraduate	94.3%	92.6%	95.8%
Graduate	92.6%	93.9%	96.3%

### UNDERGRADUATE COURSE COMPLETION RATES

	2007	2008	2009
Business	91.4%	91.4%	97.2%
Computer Science	92.9%	93%	96.1%
Information Systems	97.3%	93.2%	96.1%
Nursing	84.5%	88.7%	97.8%

In 2009 American Sentinel combined all informatics courses into one category for aggregated course completion rates

### GRADUATE COURSE COMPLETION RATES

	2007	2008	2009
Business	87.0%	87.2%	95.2%
Computer Science	93.3%	93.9%	95.4%
Information Systems	94.5%	95.8%	95.4%
Nursing	92.0%	98.6%	98.2%

In 2009 American Sentinel combined all informatics courses into one category for aggregated course completion rates

## PROGRAM COMPLETION RATES

NAME OF DEGREE PROGRAM	YEARS TO	DATE OF SAMPLE	GRADUATION RATE %
Bachelor of Science Computer Science	8	1/1/2001 – 12/31/2001	64%
Bachelor of Science Information Systems	8	1/1/2001 – 12/31/2001	43%
Master of Science Computer Science	4	1/1/2005 – 12/31/2005	46%
Master of Science Information Systems	4	1/1/2005 – 12/31/2005	45%
Master Business Administration	4	1/1/2005 – 12/31/2005	65%
Master of Science Nursing	4	1/1/2005 – 12/31/2005	100%
AVERAGE RATE ALL DEGREE PROGRAMS			61%
AVERAGE RATE MASTER'S PROGRAMS			64%
AVERAGE RATE BACHELOR'S WITH 8 YEARS TO COMPLETE			54%

American Sentinel has seen an average increase in program completion rates in all programs. We are still not satisfied with our current rates, but we continue to add services to help students reach their goals of completing a degree.