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In academia, we believe that a college education prepares people in myriad ways, teaching young adults how to become independent and good citizens, and helping people later in life transform their careers. Yet in recent years, with the global economic crisis impacting our country in ways we never dreamed, there has been much debate about the value of a college degree. Certainly, there is plenty of anecdotal evidence that college is worthwhile, but more than ever, higher education institutions must prove to students that their investment in their education—and the college they choose—is money well spent.

The importance of higher education is a topic of great interest to American Sentinel University. Ours is a university that serves students who have turned to college at a point in their lives when they want to make a change, make an impact and increase their own value as workers and citizens. The American Sentinel student is going to college to further their career and better their life, and we pledge to them that our programs are carefully designed to help them do so.

In this annual report, we share with you our research about the value of higher education, and of course, the value of an American Sentinel education. As a relatively new organization, we are continually learning how best to measure our performance and compare ourselves against other online universities. More importantly, we strive to use the data we gather to make improvements that will allow us to offer the best education possible to the students who have invested in us.

This year, we have made a number of important changes at American Sentinel to strengthen our foundation and help ensure the future success of our students. We have added new personnel and implemented processes to provide us the support we need to deliver high-quality educational programs. Learn more about our work in the pages to come. As always, thank you for your interest and support.

Dr. Kenneth McLennan
We have always believed that while solid course instructional design and delivery models are crucial to the success of our online learners, just as important is our commitment to academics.

A Message from the CEO
American Sentinel University

When American Sentinel University was founded in 2006, online learning was not new, but our founders felt a unique approach was necessary—one that would focus on strategies of online instruction and how best to teach adult learners. More importantly, in the years leading up to our founding, our leadership spent several years fine-tuning a pedagogical approach that centers around attaining effective program results. In other words, what is the desired impact of an American Sentinel education? What are the student learning outcomes for each of our programs, and how do we help students achieve them before they graduate?

We have always believed that while solid course instructional design and delivery models are crucial to the success of our online learners, just as important is our commitment to academics. Each of our programs is carefully planned to guide students to attain certain skills and aptitudes that will enable them to further their careers and civic lives. In 2011, we continued to work toward measuring and reporting on students’ progress toward those outcomes, entering into a number of important partnerships that will help us fulfill this promise.

As we move forward during this uncertain time in the global economy, we recognize the importance of our vision to offer nontraditional students accessible, high-quality education through the innovative use of technology, but we understand that attaining this vision requires a forward-thinking approach. American Sentinel students seek a good return on their investment. They turn to us for market-relevant programs that will help them further their careers in emerging or growing industries. In all that we do, value creation for our students is our highest priority.

Proving the value of an American Sentinel education is an effort that requires measurement and assessment. It requires a guiding vision and the right team to transform that vision into tangible goals and steps. In this 2011 annual report, we are excited to share with you American Sentinel University’s areas of progress. Thanks to you, our stakeholders, for continuing to hold us to the highest standards and for believing in us every step of the way.

Dr. Richard Oliver
Margaret Meade once said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” In 2011, this has been something of a mantra at American Sentinel University as we have bolstered our leadership team and staff, knowing that our people are the force that will drive us toward our goals. The university has grown significantly this past year and since our inception, and thus, strengthening our team was a top priority these past 12 months to guarantee our students continue to receive excellent support and service throughout their college journeys.

This year, we added several advisors to our student success team in order to make certain each and every student receives the individualized attention they deserve. Recognizing that returning to school after a few (or many) years in the workplace can be a challenge, we also created a new position: new-student success advisor. These advisors serve as mentors, guiding students through their first four months at the university. And we have hired several new deans and full-time faculty members in our business, information technology and nursing programs. Through these hires as well as our numerous improvements to our internal processes, we are working to provide better academic and administrative support to our students.

Ultimately, our success at American Sentinel lies in our people. Our administration and staff guide us as we work toward achieving our strategic objectives and define and continually improve our programs. Our faculty members teach our program content, paying careful attention to whatever is needed to ensure students achieve learning outcomes.

Just as important, they instill in students the critical thinking and analytical skills they need to succeed in any career. And our students and alumni are the result of our work, embodying the American Sentinel education and approach. Together, we have made great strides toward achieving our vision to be recognized as a world leader in innovative online education. While 2011 was a year of great progress, we believe it is also the foundation for even greater success in the years to come.

Mary Adams
Higher education results in higher earnings.
By 2018, 63 percent of American jobs will require some form of postsecondary education, according to the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. Projections show that the country will fall short of that number by at least three million. As of 2008, just 38 percent of adults held an associate degree or higher.

There are many reasons for this unfortunate gap. First is cost. Over the past several decades, the average annual increase in college tuition cost has consistently outpaced the rate of inflation and the growth of family incomes. Many students, even those from middle-class families, make the assumption that a college education is simply too expensive for them to afford, unaware of federal financial aid options that could benefit them. For adult students with families to support, the cost of college is an important consideration particularly when weighed against lost income while in school and expected future earnings.

Another primary reason some choose to forgo college for the workforce is access. Students coming from families where the parents did not pursue higher education are often unfamiliar with college and the application and admission process. Some students have historically been unable or unwilling to relocate to go to college, thereby bringing up geographic barriers—that is, until schools like American Sentinel University came into existence.

One reality about those who do not attend college is that many are low-income individuals or minorities. Underperforming high schools in the nation’s poorest areas typically have some of the lowest graduation rates, resulting in a low number of college-going students. And the cycle of poverty continues generation after generation, whereby the disadvantaged do not go to college due to a variety of financial and other obstacles.

Despite this, the rate of college enrollment is on the rise, suggesting that many—from high school graduates to nontraditional students—believe that the pursuit of a college education is the path to prosperity; that a degree is worth the investment because it will result in greater earning potential and a better life.

And they are correct. Allow us to show why.
Higher Education Results in Higher Earnings

A 2005 study conducted by economists at the W.P. Carey School of Business at Arizona State University concluded that mean annual earnings increase with additional education. As one might expect, people with high school diplomas earn more than those who have only completed some high school. People with bachelor’s degrees earn more than those with high school diplomas. People with graduate education earn more than those with bachelor’s degrees. And people with postgraduate education earn more than those with graduate education.

Other interesting findings from the study include the following:

- If measured as a financial investment, the net return of the college-education investment is approximately 12 percent a year, above inflation.
- Average annual earnings of individuals with bachelor’s degrees are more than 75 percent higher than the earnings of individuals with high school diplomas.
- An individual with a bachelor’s degree earns an average of $1 million more (over a lifetime) than a person with only a high school diploma.
- Workers in the 30-34 age group earned on average $24,100 (annual earnings) or 77 percent more if they had a bachelor’s degree than if they only had a high school diploma (and $30,700 annually/87 percent more for the 40-44 age group).
- The earnings premium from further undergraduate and graduate education has been on the rise the last several decades. In the 1980-1984 period, male workers age 35-44 with a bachelor’s degree earned 38 percent more than those with just a high school diploma. In the 2000-2003 period, this premium had risen to 94 percent.

Mean annual earnings by age and educational attainment in the United States

![Graph showing mean annual earnings by age and educational attainment in the United States.](chart.png)
Higher Education Results in a Better Society and Economy

There are a number of societal benefits to having an educated workforce. Workers with a college education are likely to have good employer-provided health care insurance and retirement benefits. College-educated workers have significantly lower rates of unemployment than less educated workers and have much greater earning potential. Higher levels of educational attainment are associated with lower crime and poverty rates.

And of course, children of college graduates are more likely to attend college. As one would expect, the home environment plays a factor in students’ academic ability, educational goals and the value placed on the pursuit of education.

The Value of a Degree from American Sentinel University

How exactly does the information presented here relate to American Sentinel students?

Our students include some of the nation’s most underrepresented populations. We serve a high percentage of first-generation college students and non-traditional students who are pursuing a bachelor’s degree for the first time (the average age of an American Sentinel student is 42). Many of our students put college on the back burner to serve their country or raise a family and have now made the commitment to go back to school.

Because of their stage in life, students come to us with specific goals in mind: They want to join a community of learners and earn a respected degree that will position them for their best future. American Sentinel appeals to these students for many reasons. We offer flexible, online access to high-quality education, and we offer that education at one of the lowest tuition rates among online universities. We also offer dedicated personal support and success advisors, which students can’t appreciate until they enroll. Our focus on excellent student
support is another differentiator for us, receiving high ratings from students.

According to the Lumina™ Foundation for Education, there is a growing consensus that economic recovery hinges on a better educated workforce: “Analyses of economic growth show that the vitality of economies—either local or national—depends less on “home runs” (such as securing a new manufacturing plant) than on the skills and knowledge of the workforce. Talent is the key and higher education is the lever for developing it.”

Without a doubt, the value of a college degree can be quantified in many ways, but education’s impact is much more than an economic return. At American Sentinel, we know for certain that education has the power to transform lives because we’ve witnessed it firsthand. Education drives our prosperity as a nation, and its spillover effect is immeasurable.

Just as students invest in us, we recognize that our investment in them has a long-lasting effect on our communities and our nation. And that, we believe, is an investment of extraordinary value.

References


Education has the power to transform lives.
As part of our ongoing commitment to ensuring our students achieve course and program learning outcomes, in 2011, American Sentinel made the decision to join Transparency by Design (TbD), a consortium of accredited, adult-serving distance higher education institutions that assist adult learners in becoming informed consumers. TbD members voluntarily provide an unprecedented level of data on learning outcomes, how students perform and more on TbD’s College Choices for Adults website.

Our interest in transparency, ethical practices, and open and honest communication with our community of stakeholders goes back to our founding, and since 2008, we have participated in Transparency by Design as an authorized observer. Recently, TbD opted to allow nationally accredited institutions such as American Sentinel to join its initiative, and so in 2012, we will become a full member, joining 19 other online colleges across the country. This commitment requires that we agree to contribute institutional and program data to TbD and College Choices for Adults, such as our costs, demographics, completion rates, average class sizes, learner engagement, learner outcomes, program-level and institution-specific learning outcomes, third-party assessment results and much more.

As we continue our efforts to assess our programs and report our findings, joining this initiative is an exciting step toward achieving our goals. We believe our participation in this benchmarking effort will help us identify our strengths and improve upon our weaknesses and will give us access to like-minded colleagues at our peer institutions.

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

As a TbD institution, moving forward we will utilize the NSSE tool to assess and improve the collegiate experiences of our undergraduate students. This voluntary student survey benchmarks American Sentinel against other colleges and universities. Answers to the NSSE questions give students insight into our culture, how
students rate our program quality, achievement of learning outcomes and overall educational experience. Students rank their level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences and supportive campus environment.

American Sentinel administered our first NSSE in February 2012 with 330 students participating. We expect NSSE results in July 2012 and will devise action plans to improve the undergraduate experience based on those results thereafter.

The Noel-Levitz Priorities Survey for Online Learners (PSOL)

TbD requires all member institutions to use the PSOL tool, as it addresses the needs of adult distance learners. This nationally standardized instrument helps universities measure satisfaction levels of online learners, who have unique needs, expectations and priorities than students attending classes on campus. The PSOL has been administered by more than 153 institutions and completed by more than 154,000 students since 2001.

We have an ongoing commitment to ensuring our students achieve course and program learning outcomes.
American Sentinel participated in the PSOL for the first time in March 2011. In June 2011, we received our PSOL results. Our response rate was 25 percent, with 381 students participating in the survey.

Students identified the following strengths:
- Registration for online courses is convenient.
- Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment.
- Program requirements are clear and reasonable.
- This institution responds quickly when I request information.
- Billing and payment procedures are convenient for me.
- My program advisor is accessible by telephone and e-mail.

Two areas in particular showed satisfaction rates higher than those of online learners attending other universities (based on 84,067 records):
- Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment.

Students also identified several areas where the university could make improvements:
- The quality of online instruction is excellent.
- Instructional materials are appropriate for program content.
- Faculty are responsive to student needs.
- Student assignments are clearly defined in the syllabus.
- Faculty provide timely feedback about student progress.

Two areas showed lower satisfaction when compared to the pool of other national online learners (based on 84,067 records):
- The quality of online instruction is excellent.
- Instructional materials are appropriate for program content.
American Sentinel takes our PSOL results very seriously, and in the months since these results were released to us, we have made a number of important improvements:

- The Office of Academic Services has established a tracking log to document every academic concern expressed by students. This is in addition to our annual completion of accrediting and governmental guidelines regarding student complaints. The university expects to detect patterns based on this year-long inquiry so that we can determine improvements to make.

- During the next deployment of PSOL in March 2012, the university will participate in the enhanced demographic reports, which can more precisely identify student satisfaction scores by academic program. These specific results help us make changes as needed and understand where our strengths lie.

- We participated in the Noel-Levitz student retention national conference in July 2011, which allowed us to network with other distance learning professionals.
ETS Proficiency Profile: Direct Measure

The ETS Proficiency Profile is an online, nationally standardized test that assesses four core skill areas: critical thinking, reading, writing and mathematics. The test gauges student performance in the basic college competencies against students who take the test at 400 other institutions nationwide. The ETS Proficiency Profile is specifically designed for distance-learning institutions.

American Sentinel University began using the instrument in September 2011. As of October 1, 2011, we request that all entering undergraduate students take the ETS exam prior to completing their first course. Those students will also be asked to complete ETS Proficiency Profile upon graduation to measure gains in college-level competencies during their matriculation.

The first aggregate reporting of American Sentinel student scores will occur in June 2012, and we will issue our first report about one month later. We will use the results to add or revise courses in the general education areas as well as courses in the majors that emphasize general-education skills. We may also provide academic tutoring in college-level competencies if students show deficiencies.

2011 American Sentinel University Student Survey

Every year, American Sentinel conducts a student survey to assess student satisfaction with our course delivery, instruction and more. We also benchmark these results against previous years’ survey results (however in 2011, survey questions changed slightly, so some comparisons below are from 2009 to 2011). Below is a summary of the major findings from the 2011 survey, to which 719 students responded.
2011 ETS Results

COURSE DELIVERY
• Overall – Overall student satisfaction with course delivery was 90 percent (as compared to 92 percent in 2009). Just four percent of students expressed dissatisfaction with Moodle, our learning platform, while six percent were neutral about its overall ease of use.

• Discussion forums – 79 percent of students surveyed agree that the discussion forums improved their understanding of course concepts. This is a dramatic increase from 2009, when 54 percent agreed.

• Technology services – 60 percent of students surveyed agree that technology services were available to them when needed, up from 57 percent in 2009. Seven percent of respondents disagreed with this statement, a two percent increase from 2009.

• Library – 55 percent of students surveyed indicated the library resources were useful to them in their learning, while 14 percent did not believe they were helpful and 31 percent were neutral. In the 2010 survey, the question was posed as “The materials from the online library were sufficient to allow me to meet the objectives of the course,” with 71 percent agreeing.

INSTRUCTION
• Instruction – 87 percent of students surveyed expressed overall satisfaction with instructional services, which stayed the same from the 2009 survey. Five percent said no and eight percent were neutral.

• Encouragement – 86 percent of students surveyed felt they were adequately encouraged by faculty and staff to keep studying (up from 82 percent in 2009).

• Questions and answers – 85 percent of students surveyed felt their general questions were answered in accurate and timely manner (up from 83 percent in 2010).

OVERALL SATISFACTION
When asked if they believe they will be able to achieve their goals upon completing their studies, 97 percent of students surveyed said yes, while three percent said no.
When asked if they would recommend their studies to a friend, 94 percent of students surveyed said yes, while six percent said no.

When asked if all things considered, they were satisfied with their studies at American Sentinel University, 95 percent said yes, while five percent said no.

These percentages are the same as in 2010.

OTHER

We asked a number of other questions in our 2011 survey—the responses to which are below:

• **Grading** – 89 percent of students surveyed felt assignments and examinations were fairly graded.

• **Academic and technical help** – 82 percent of students surveyed felt they receive sufficient academic and technical help when they need it (14 percent were neutral and four percent disagreed).

• **Promptness** – 77 percent of students surveyed felt their complaints and questions were addressed promptly and adequately.

• **Distance education** – 83 percent of students surveyed felt they would take another distance-education course or program (11 percent were neutral and five percent disagreed).

• **Accreditation** – 83 percent of students said American Sentinel’s accreditation influenced their decision to enroll.
In our general education curriculum, American Sentinel University has traditionally focused on typical general education competencies: critical thinking, communications, information fluency, numerical fluency, understanding the ethical and diversity dimensions in modern life, and a global orientation.

As a forward-thinking institution that offers two geographic information systems programs (an Associate of Science Geographic Information Systems and a Bachelor of Science Geographic Information Systems), we have come to believe that geospatial competencies must now be included among the core competencies expected of our students. As such, we have undertaken an initiative to incorporate geospatial competencies into our general education curriculum. We will do this by adding geospatial exercises, experiences and projects into each of our programs.

Our goal is to ensure that American Sentinel students acquire a working understanding of GIS and geospatial concepts. In a marketing course, for example, students might learn how maps and data about geographic areas can be used to better develop a marketing plan. In a nursing course, students might study cases about managing a flu pandemic based on geographic information. In today’s highly connected world, geospatial competencies have become crucial to contextual decision-making.

In late 2011, we began assessing our programs and course outcomes to identify areas where we can insert geospatially themed activities and lessons. Our next step will be to develop those exercises within the context of each American Sentinel program.

**Coming Soon:**

**Master of Geospatial Information Systems and Geospatial Information Systems Graduate Certificate**

In 2011, we began to develop two new programs for graduate students: a Master of Geospatial Information Systems and Geospatial Information Systems Graduate Certificate. Both programs are currently under review with our accrediting agency, the Distance Education and Training Council. Once both programs are approved—we anticipate approval in spring 2012—we will build out the curriculums and begin the recruiting process for prospective students.
We designed a program that will help develop strategic leadership and business acumen to drive change within organizations.
In June 2010, American Sentinel University launched the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) Executive Leadership program with an initial cohort of seven students. Our first doctoral program, this bold new degree focuses on developing nurse executives who manage patient care within their organizations. In an increasingly complex health care environment, we recognized that the industry needs strong nurse leaders, so we designed a program that will help them develop the strategic leadership and business acumen to drive change within their organizations.

As of the end of 2011, we welcomed four cohorts into this program, which has grown continuously. Currently we have approximately 70 nurse leaders in our DNP Executive Leadership program, and our first graduating class will complete its studies in June 2012. If this program follows the lead of the rest of American Sentinel’s nursing programs, we expect it to continue to grow in numbers and reputation.

A Breadth of Nursing Executives

One of the key reasons our doctoral program has been so successful is because of the caliber of the students in the program: students who contribute their experiences and insight to their cohorts. Our program has attracted leaders such as the regional directors for Kaiser Permanente and Tenet Healthcare, the vice president of nursing from Children’s Hospital of Orange County (as well as several other executives from that hospital), and directors, chiefs and leaders from Shands Health Care at the University of Florida Health Sciences Center, the King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research Centre (a premier Middle East hospital system), and IASIS Healthcare, among others.

A First-Class Faculty

DNP Executive Leadership students tell us that our faculty set us apart. Our professors in the doctoral program have significant experience in some of the leading hospital systems in the world. They teach students through
real-world examples, enabling them to apply the knowledge they gain in the classroom immediately to their organizations. Here are a few highlights of the accomplishments and backgrounds of our faculty members:

• The dean of health sciences and nursing at American Sentinel has extensive leadership experience, including serving as vice president of clinical operations for one of the country’s first Medicare-managed care organizations.

• The associate dean for doctoral studies at American Sentinel has held leadership positions with the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, Shriners Hospital for Children in Philadelphia, the American College of Physicians, the American Nurses Association and several other organizations, and has held faculty appointments at Vanderbilt University, University of North Dakota, and Yale University, where she was associate dean for clinical affairs.

• Several of our nursing faculty members are Robert Wood Johnson Executive Nurse fellows.

• Several of our nursing faculty members are American Academy of Nurse Practitioners fellows.

• One of our faculty members served as chief operating officer and senior executive at Kadlec Medical Center and spent 26 years at Intermountain Health Care in nursing leadership.

• One of our faculty members owns Nurse Consultants of Arkansas and is the risk manager and corporate compliance officer for ConvaCare Management.

• One of our faculty members is regional manager of operations for the Little Clinic of Arizona.

Cutting-Edge Curriculum

We built the DNP Executive Leadership curriculum to address issues confronting the rapidly changing health care industry and to prepare nurse executives to lead in today’s unique environment. Our practice-focused curriculum centers on strategic leadership skills, financial models, risk management, business intelligence, evidence-based practice and health services research. Feedback to date confirms that American Sentinel is in tune with contemporary issues in health care and that our

National League for Nursing Accreditating Commission (NLNAC) Candidacy Status

In 2011, American Sentinel University applied for NLNAC accreditation of our bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral nursing programs and was granted candidacy status. The next step in the accrediting process is an NLNAC site visit, which takes place February 28-March 1, 2012. Seeking specialized accreditation is an important step forward for our nursing programs, and we will work toward achieving full NLNAC accreditation in 2012. We expect to be one of just a few universities accredited by NLNAC and the Commission for Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE).
We built the DNP Executive Leadership curriculum to prepare nurse executives to lead in today’s unique environment.

curriculum is reflective of that. Students continue to refer their colleagues and our program has grown significantly—in large part because nurse executives appreciate the curriculum we offer.

DNP Education Leadership

In November 2011, we submitted our request to the DETC to offer a new doctoral program at American Sentinel: the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) Educational Leadership, which fosters the development of nursing deans and directors for nursing education programs.

With an increasing need for nurses, and despite declining state and community college budgets, it is important for deans and directors to be skilled in financial management and fund development, new models of education using technology and simulation, and education policy. American Sentinel is focused on providing the next level of innovative education to today’s nursing-education leaders.

Pending approval, our hope is to start our first cohort in June 2012.
Increasingly, the electronic education portfolio is becoming a national best-practice assessment tool to demonstrate a student’s progress and achievement in a course or program. In 2011, American Sentinel rolled out an education portfolio feature to students in the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) Education Leadership program. DNP Education Leadership students use eFolio, an electronic portfolio that allows them to showcase online their accomplishments and progress toward learning outcomes.

Portfolios can enhance the assessment of core competencies. An educational portfolio contains a collection of work selected by the student to illustrate growth and learning over time. At American Sentinel University, the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) program utilizes eFolio as an education tool for students to showcase their accomplishments in the program, reflect on their education journey and to document academic progress, with particular attention to the application of coursework into their practice.

Each doctoral student builds and maintains an eFolio website to demonstrate the achievement of the six competencies of the DNP Educational Leadership program: leadership, finance, technology, strategic planning, policy and research. The 10 program learning outcomes are:

1. Lead complex organizations through strategic decision-making and change implementation.

2. Assume roles as leaders and collaborators with other professionals and communities in evaluating, planning, providing and evaluating health care.

3. Create new models to explain, predict and improve the performance of organizations.

4. Enhance professional nursing practice through the generation of research and evidence-based practice.

5. Utilize health information technology to analyze meaningful data that informs leadership.

6. Utilize theoretical knowledge, data and best-practice research to create strategic plans for organizational change.
7. Collaborate with others in research activities and utilize knowledge gained to create improved models of care and organizational performance.

8. Lead other nursing professionals in the acceptance of accountability and responsibility for one’s own professional judgment and actions.

9. Create new models for nursing in a global society.

10. Develop health policy that considers environmental, social justice, consumer and other issues.

The eFolios include the student’s reflections about his or her education and detailed evidence of how the student achieved each program learning outcome. Eventually, we intend to roll out the eFolio initiative university wide and make this a key part of all American Sentinel programs.
ACER: Our Outcomes-Focused Pedagogy for Online Learning

Is learning online just an extension of learning in the classroom, or is there a need for a new pedagogy unique to the digital platform?

This was the question contemplated by the founders of American Sentinel University as we made plans for our new institution in the late 1990s and early 2000s. While staying focused on solid course instructional design and delivery approaches, our answer to this question was yes: we wanted to be different than the many other emerging online programs and universities. Our goal was to develop a comprehensive approach centered on adult professionals and above all, focused on program outcomes.

Therefore, we developed a pedagogical approach comprised of four essential components: Access, Community, Experimentation and Reflection (ACER). Since our inception, ACER has continued to be the enduring and guiding methodology of American Sentinel University. We believe it is the primary reason for our survival and success.

Here are the key elements of student learning at American Sentinel, as guided by ACER:

**ACCESS**

To us, access encompasses:

- An easily accessible infrastructure
- Access to best-practice content
- Core-competency development
- Social imperatives

**Infrastructure.** American Sentinel University’s mission is to provide students easy access to educational content and student services. We are a 100-percent online institution; therefore, there are no physical barriers to attendance, and all of a student’s academic needs—from admission through graduation—are handled online.

**Content.** We develop our curriculum to contain best-practice content. Because we have much greater control over individual course curriculum than would be possible in a traditional setting, American Sentinel is able to update our courses and degree programs on a regular basis.

**Core competencies.** We embed core competencies—oral and written communication skills, interpersonal communication, critical thinking, ethical insight, global awareness, information fluency and numerical
fluency—into our curriculum at the course and program level.

**Social imperatives.** ACER functions as a guiding philosophy at many levels within the university, steering technology development, student recruiting and advising, and tuition. For example, our guiding principle in setting tuition is to keep it as low as possible to offer educational access to even the most financially challenged students.

**COMMUNITY**

Community is focused on the exchange of thoughts and ideas. American Sentinel tries to engender in our programs a commitment to placing the student in a community of scholars. Learning outcomes are enhanced when students engage in interactive dialogue with faculty and one another. We create our community in four ways:

- Course and program structure
- Learning ecology
- Core-competency development
- Technology support

**Course and program structure.** Courses and programs are structured so that students must fully engage. Students share ideas and draw conclusions based upon the evidence presented.

The online environment provides students with opportunities to examine the core competencies in a non-threatening environment.

**Learning ecology.** Faculty set expectations for interactions that support equity, respect, collaboration and the sharing
of multiple perspectives. Class assignments emphasize a shift in authority from teacher to students. This collaborative learning framework means that student roles and tasks are less structured by the professor and that students take ownership of their learning.

**Core-competency development.** Community interaction gives students practice in communicating their ideas. To support the development of core competencies, all students have access to their professors, the American Sentinel virtual library and other resources.

**Technology.** We began implementing new technologies in 2011 that will allow for more convenient self-service functionality for students and better reporting on the back end in 2012.

**EXPERIMENTATION**

Experimentation in the learning process is the third component in the ACER model that encourages students to construct their own knowledge base by asking questions, considering possible answers and learning from the outcomes. We continue to develop ways for students to enhance their experience and source new information through such resources as our online library service.

**REFLECTION**

To help students think about and critically examine what they learn in courses and throughout their programs, we focus on four components of the reflection stage of ACER:

- Reflective self-assessment
- Technology infrastructure
- Academic advising
- Assessment

**Reflective self-assessment.** At American Sentinel, students are required to complete formal and informal writing assignments in every course to ensure they reflect on their learning. Faculty members model reflective thinking throughout the learning process. Required reflective journal assignments also help students process what they have learned.

**Technology infrastructure.** American Sentinel aims to provide every student with a personal electronic portfolio with which they systematically reflect
on their learning process. The eFolio will help them present aptitudes and skills learned via their program outcomes.

**Academic advising.** American Sentinel begins the reflective process by encouraging students to discuss their career objectives as they work with dedicated advisors to develop their degree plans. Each new student is assigned an advisor who works with them throughout orientation and during the first several months at the university to provide support in keeping them focused on their professional, career and educational objectives.

**Assessment.** Assessment is an ongoing process based on performance, connected directly with curricular material and driven by students. Faculty use rubrics to grade assignments, such as reflective journals, formal and informal writing, e-portfolios and discussion questions. ACER also anticipates that over the next few years all graduating students will be required to complete an e-portfolio, which includes a selection of assignments from each course that the student completed at American Sentinel.

In the future, we hope to conduct more rigorous research on ACER, but for now, we do assess the American Sentinel student experience quantitatively and qualitatively. We conduct several student surveys to assess program quality and student satisfaction, and we find that the data supports our outcomes specifically related to our online pedagogy.

American Sentinel University was founded with an overriding commitment to educational innovation, and the development of the ACER model was the fundamental component of that philosophy. We recognize that our work is just beginning. The process of integrating all aspects of ACER into every class and program is a work in progress, but the ACER pedagogy remains our guiding vision.
Since our founding just six years ago, American Sentinel University has grown continuously and now has more than 2,000 active students. To best serve our students, we recognize that we must have the right leadership, faculty and support staff in place. In 2011, we welcomed a number of distinguished academics to our team:

**Deans**

**Victoria Brahe**  
*Assistant Dean, Nursing*  
Ms. Brahe joins American Sentinel from Western Governors University, where she was a nurse mentor. She has taught online since 2004. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in education with an emphasis on instructional design for online learning.

**Devon Cancilla**  
*Dean, Technology and Business*  
Dr. Cancilla joins American Sentinel from Western Washington University, where he was director of scientific technical services and associate professor. He holds a Ph.D. from the University of California at Los Angeles School of Public Health.

**Joy Green-Hadden**  
*Assistant Dean, Health Sciences and Nursing*  
Dr. Green-Hadden brings more than 20 years of nursing experience as a certified nurse practitioner to American Sentinel. She holds a DNP from Case Western Reserve University.

**Betty Nelson**  
*Associate Dean, Doctoral Studies*  
Dr. Nelson has held leadership positions with the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, Shriners Hospital for Children in Philadelphia, the American College of Physicians and the American Nurses Association and has held faculty appointments at Vanderbilt University, the University of North Dakota and Yale University (where she was also associate dean for clinical affairs). She holds a Ph.D. in health services research from the University of Pennsylvania.
Professors

Deborah Bishop
Professor, Nursing
Ms. Bishop is a clinical auditor at Centura Health. She holds a Master of Nursing Administration from the University of Phoenix.

Valentina Gokenbach
Professor, Nursing
Dr. Gokenbach brings 35 years of administrative health care experience to American Sentinel and is an author and frequent presenter on leadership and health and wellness. Her community work includes serving as medical administrator for a Haitian orphanage affiliated with author Mitch Albom. She holds a Doctor of Management in organizational leadership from the University of Phoenix.

Roger Green
Professor, Nursing
Dr. Green has more than 15 years of nursing experience and was the Western division vice president of operations for the Little Clinic. He is a fellow of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners. He holds a DNP in clinical nursing from Rush University.

Kathy Wright
Professor, Nursing
Ms. Wright joins American Sentinel from the North Central Region of Florida’s Department of Health Children’s Medical Services Network, where she was director of nursing. She holds an MSN from the University of Texas at Austin.

American Sentinel also appointed Dr. John Bourne, formerly of our Board of Trust, to the position of university provost starting March 1, 2012. Bourne is a prominent innovator in distance learning, including being among the first educators to employ Second Life® as a virtual classroom. Bourne has served as the executive director of the Sloan Consortium (Sloan-C”), professor emeritus of technology at Babson College, and professor emeritus of electrical and computer engineering at Franklin W. Olin College. Earlier in his career Bourne was the professor of electrical and computer engineering. He founded the Journal of Asynchronous Learning
Networks (JALN) and remains the editor. Bourne also established the Asynchronous Learning Network (ALN) in 1996, supported by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. Developing the Student Support Team

In 2011, American Sentinel added five advisors to our student success and retention team in 2011 to improve our advisor-to-student ratio and ensure all students receive individualized attention and ample guidance. We also instituted a new student success advisor role, which is responsible for providing up-front student support for brand new students, guiding them through everything from how to buy books to degree planning to becoming acquainted with Moodle, our online learning platform.

According to Mark Cobb, director for student success and retention, approximately 25 percent of new students are considered high risk for one of three reasons:

1) They are facing a personal challenge that may translate into academic challenges.

2) They have struggled with academics in the past, due to language or other barriers.

3) They are uncertain about American Sentinel or may have had a bad experience at a previous institution.

The new student success advisor proactively works with all students through their second course at the university, focusing heavily on this high-risk population to increase retention and help set a solid foundation for those who need the most support. The goal is to help students make a smooth transition into subsequent semester and beyond at the university.

In 2012, our student support team will strengthen the way it measures academic progress and persistence. Advisors will analyze registration rates and GPA progression from term to term.

Finally, the student support and retention group enhanced the resources available to students through My Campus, our online student community, and began hosting weekly webinars on topics from student resources to professional development. The series has been well attended, and American Sentinel plans to put more resources toward it in 2012.
In 2012 American Sentinel University joined the Transparency by Design initiative, which now serves as our guide for all benchmarking reporting decisions. The university has been an observer of Transparency by Design (TbD) since 2008.

We are now one of 20 online colleges and universities to voluntarily adhere to the reporting requirements of TbD. From a metrics standpoint, this means that we voluntarily report a variety of institutional and program data for TbD’s College Choices for Adults website. Through this site, anyone will be able to compare us to other online institutions that are also members of this initiative.

Some of TbD’s data requirements necessitate that we begin collecting new information about our university and from our students, so while we are not able to report completely “apples-to-apples” metrics against our TbD peers in 2011, we will do so in future annual reports. Transparency is a high priority at American Sentinel, and we strive to provide our students, alumni and other stakeholders the information they need to measure our outcomes, performance and progress toward our objectives.

### Demographics

Total enrollment – 2,091

Average age: 42

Age distribution:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19–29</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–39</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–49</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50–59</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 and Above</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part-time/full-time enrollment: 87% PT, 13% FT

Race/ethnicity of students:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian / Alaska Native</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian / Pacific</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
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## Gender:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(not specified)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Graduate/undergraduate:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Military students:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(none)</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(unknown)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Percent of total students enrolled by program as of December 2011:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Area/Level</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business-Associate</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business-Bachelor’s</td>
<td>5.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business-Master’s</td>
<td>4.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informatics-Associate</td>
<td>1.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informatics-Bachelor’s</td>
<td>19.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informatics-Master’s</td>
<td>2.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Prof-Bachelor’s</td>
<td>40.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Prof-Master’s</td>
<td>22.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Prof - Doctorate</td>
<td>3.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Learner Progress

### Learner completion rates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree Program</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BS Computer Science</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS Computer Science</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS Information Systems</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BS Information Systems</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master Business Administration</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS Nursing</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBA Health Care</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AS GIS</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BS Nursing</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Learner retention rate for part-time students attending American Sentinel for the first time: **77%**
2011 Course Completion Rates: American Sentinel students complete 99.7% of their courses. Of the 258 courses taught in 2011, only one course had a completion rate of less than 90%.

2011 Graduates by program:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>#</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AS Criminal Justice</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AS Business Administration</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AS Computer Science</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AS Geographic Information Systems</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Science Technology Management</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Science Web Design and Development</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Science Computer Science, Game Programming</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Science Geographic Information Systems</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Science Information Systems, Geographic Systems</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Science Business Administration</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Science Information Systems Security</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Science Information Technology</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Science Management Information Systems</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor Science Business Administration</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Science Computer Science</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Science Information Systems</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Science Nursing</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master of Computer Science, Computer Programming</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master of Science Healthcare Information Management</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master of Science Computer Science, Information Systems Security</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master Health Systems Management</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master of Science Business Intelligence</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master of Business Administration - Healthcare</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master of Business Administration</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master of Science Information Systems</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master of Science Computer Science</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master of Science Nursing</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>