

Interim
Report to PSU Faculty Senate

From
Ad-Hoc Committee on Online Learning

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Definitions:

Face-to-Face/Traditional Classroom Teaching and Learning: Teaching that is conducted in a university classroom with little or no materials presented or shared online.

Online: Learning that is conducted primarily online with one or two face-to-face sessions dedicated to class orientation or testing. Material can be presented online in a variety of ways: through written work, videos, and/or audio tracks. Communication between faculty and students and among students is conducted through online discussions or email. Students submit their coursework and receive feedback and assessment of their work online. Fully online courses typically utilize the course management system that the school has adopted. For PSU, this is Desire to Learn (D2L).

Hybrid: At PSU, Hybrid courses are defined as courses in which 50% or less of the class is spent in a traditional classroom with face-to-face instruction. The online portion of the course can include the same components of online interaction described above.

Web-enhanced: These courses are face-to-face courses that use web-based platforms to provide course materials. Many courses at PSU are web-enhanced and use D2L to deliver this content and support to students.

The Ad-Hoc Committee on Online Learning has met since late Fall 2010 to consider the issues raised by the Faculty Senate in May 2010. As there is currently a search for a new leader of a new Online Learning Services department, many of the short term issues brought to this committee cannot be answered at this point. The new Director of Online Services will need to address them when one has been appointed. However, the committee offers these suggestions and ideas regarding longer range issues involving online learning.

1. Principles Guiding Online Learning at PSU

We recommend that a set of Principles be adopted to support Online Learning Practices at Portland State University and would like to propose the following:

- a) The quality of the learning experience for students will be equal, if not identical, whether the class is offered Face-to-face, Hybrid, or entirely Online.
- b) The university commits to and undertakes ongoing assessment of the online learning environment, including understanding who our online students are, assessing learning in these courses, and seeking input from students and faculty on a regular basis.
- c) The university provides avenues for all stakeholders, faculty, students, instructional designers, and administrators for input to maximize the development of high quality educational options.
- d) Departments and individual faculty are free to make choices regarding curriculum, pedagogical strategies, and technological enhancements in the online environment as well as choosing whether or not to teach in this manner.
- e) Developing online courses or programs will not create perverse incentives for a department or individual faculty member. In other words, departments and/or individual faculty members will not benefit from offering online courses beyond the benefit online programs and courses provide to students.
- f) Policies related to costs and services associated with the student fee are transparent and accessible. The fee will be structured in a way that is fair and reflects student use of online learning services. At this point, only students who are taking hybrid or online courses are charged a fee. As most students at PSU participate in web-enhanced courses, the fee should be spread out amongst all students to lower the cost and fairly distribute the cost.

2. Input on the current economic model for Online Learning

The economic model for online learning will influence the accessibility of online courses, the role of these courses in the curriculum, and the ability of faculty to develop high quality online curricula. Currently, the OUS Board has delegated authority to OUS institution presidents to establish instructional fees for Continuing Education, Extended Programs, and Distance Education (2010-11 Academic Year Fee Book, OUS, pg. 1). It is under these structures that online courses have been traditionally developed at OUS institutions. The OUS policy has created a situation in which the online tuition rate does not go through the normal tuition setting process with the Oregon state legislature. In effect, online tuition can be set based on what the market will bear (and what an OUS president is willing to charge). At PSU, students pay \$30/credit for hybrid and \$60/credit for fully on-line courses on top of all other tuition and fees. These fees are collected and treated as a separate revenue source for online services. We would like to note that these fees are collected based on how a department designates a course in banner.

One of the reasons expressed by the administration for increasing online education is to improve access to courses. While online instruction makes courses more accessible for students who have limited mobility due to physical or scheduling constraints, the increased cost of online courses reduces *financial accessibility*. While the university has seen an increase in enrollment in online and hybrid courses even with the increased fee, we should not ignore the fact that for most of our students, this fee increases their debt. A review of online course fees at a few Oregon institutions was conducted based on information available on the web (i.e., what information a student would get about online fees).

Portland State University:

\$30/credit for hybrid courses, \$60/credit for fully online courses in addition to all other tuition and fees

Notes: The online tuition estimator (<http://www.pdx.edu/bao/tuition-estimator>) gives no indication that there are additional fees for hybrid or fully online courses. Online fees are not listed in the PSU fee document (http://www.pdx.edu/sites/www.pdx.edu.bao/files/media_assets/BAO_PSU_2010_2011_FeeBook.pdf). Apparently students become aware of the online instruction fee after registering for the course when the fee is assessed.

Oregon State University:

~\$75/credit for “e-learning courses” in addition to tuition but no other fees (building, incidental, health) are assessed. For a 12 credit load, the difference is effectively \$37/credit premium for online courses.

Notes: The online tuition estimator (<http://oregonstate.edu/fa/businessaffairs/tuition-calculator>) gives students the option for selecting either campus or “ecampus” credits.

Portland Community College:

\$20/course “Distance Learning Fee” in addition to tuition and other fees

Notes: <http://www.pcc.edu/resources/tuition-fees/>

University of Oregon

Tuition estimator does not mention online course fees (http://registrar.uoregon.edu/costs/tuition_fee_structure/undergraduate?field_student_level_and_residency=Undergraduate++Resident). It is unclear whether extra fees are charged at UofO for admitted students.

Vice Provost Melody Rose shared with us the working budget for online education. It is important to note that cost of D2L (the online learning platform) is \$200K per year while revenue from fees is \$2 million. The rest of the revenue was allocated toward additional personnel for online services. Given that students will undoubtedly take a mixture of online and face-to-face courses, segregating online fees and services does not reflect student (or faculty) experience at PSU. We were not at all convinced that the fees charged to students on top of regular tuition were justifiable.

At the same time that the argument is being made that quality of the learning experience should be independent of the mode of instruction, an economic model that sets online tuition apart from face-face tuition has the potential to undermine this goal. Since budget support for online instruction (instructional designers, course development stipends, etc.) is tied to online fees, the path for developing courses is limited. It is quite reasonable to assume that many faculty will choose to develop a fully online courses after gradually adding online content in a web-enhanced course over a period of years to test ideas out, while still using face-to-face

instruction. These faculty have less access to online instructional support since their courses are not contributing to the online budget. This “trial and error” development path should be encouraged in order for faculty to develop high quality online materials and courses. The degree of online content in a course (from web-based materials to modules to hybrid to fully online) should not influence the level of instructional support, as is currently the practice based on the economic model for online instruction.

Since many online courses have been subject to different budgetary rules than regular in-load courses, many online courses are self-support courses and have been revenue generators for the program involved. Obviously this revenue is enhanced when adjunct instructors are involved. While revenue generation in of itself is laudable, we worry about the potential for creating perverse incentives to maximize this revenue at the cost of educational quality and the exploitation of adjunct/fixed term faculty. Unlike face-to-face courses where physical constraints can limit class size, it is easy to increase the number of online students in a course. While tenured faculty can (and will) voice concerns about class size in any mode of instruction, adjuncts have much less institutional power and voice, a situation that is exacerbated by the online, off-campus mode of teaching.

3. Input on specific issues

a) Curricular Review

In considering this question, the committee has considered a full review of online and hybrid courses and programs, no new review of online and hybrid courses, and some form of review for online or hybrid courses.

While curricular review of all courses that are currently hybrid or online may be overly burdensome, the committee recommends that there should be a university-wide curricular review of programs that exist mainly online.

In addition, to ensure the quality of all course offerings that are offered in a hybrid format or fully online, we recommend that a process be developed for department chairs to approve. We believe that departments should be responsible, not individual faculty members, for deciding how courses and/or programs will be offered, face-to-face, hybrid or online. In addition, departments should continue their practice of developing clear learning objectives, pedagogies, and assessments for all of their courses whatever the modality.

b) Student Issues

Access and support: 24/7 technology support is necessary if Portland State is going to provide quality online and hybrid courses. From what we have heard, the current service is not addressing the needs of students as the after-hours service does not seem to be familiar with Desire to Learn software. The library provides excellent customer service with the 24/7 online chat function, and the committee wonders if that could be replicated in this arena.

Student Services: We are aware that there are line item budgets for student services in the online technology fee but do not know what kind of services will be available for

online students or how these services will be delivered. The committee believes that the faculty and academic professionals who will deliver these services should be part of the planning process for developing online student support mechanisms. We believe that students who pay for a service should be able to receive that service.

Testing services: The University needs to provide models for testing in online classes that ensures academic integrity. We are aware that there are many ways that testing services can be provided, and faculty need to understand what the options are. In addition, a system for scheduling onsite testing rooms and proctoring services needs to be developed and offered by the University.

c) Faculty Development Issues

The committee is concerned about the separation of online learning services from the Center for Academic Excellence and proposes that faculty development of instructors teaching hybrid or online courses should be coordinated and co-developed with staff from the Center for Academic Excellence. One idea would be to appoint a Faculty in Residence for Online Learning who works closely with the Center for Online learning and provides support for faculty. This person would be charged with deriving best practices from faculty, and from the literature, to share with other faculty and also developing and facilitating an ongoing assessment plan regarding online learning. The following questions, at a minimum, need to be addressed.

- How should faculty be taught how to transform face-to-face classes and/or develop the pedagogy of courses delivered in an online or hybrid format?
- How should faculty be taught how to use the university sanctioned software to deliver course materials? This includes software beyond D2L.
- Who will be responsible for developing materials for courses? Instructional designers? Faculty?
- How will the university share information and training about new software and pedagogies with the faculty?
- How should assessment for online and hybrid courses be addressed? Can the university provide support for face-to-face testing, for example? What are the best methods for student assessment in these formats?
- How can the university provide “best practice” models for these formats that help faculty design and deliver their courses?

d) Faculty Workload Issues

Several workload issues arise with regard to online and hybrid classes. As a general principle, our view is that the faculty members who teach a class, working with their colleagues and in light of the overall curricular goals, are the people best qualified to determine the ideal format for a class, the largest reasonable class size, and similar pedagogical aspects of class presentation. Overall guidelines and principles on these matters essentially constitute work rules and as such should be developed by the administration in conjunction with the faculty union in a collective bargaining setting. Below we give our opinion on two of the major issues.

First, if there are course format options available, then the choice to teach a given course or course section in an online or hybrid version should be up to the faculty member who is teaching it in consultation with the department chair and/or the department curriculum committee. Faculty members who are preparing to teach in an online or hybrid format and need assistance to develop materials and design the class should be given that assistance to a standard of best practice in that modality.

Second, the size of a section for an online class should be determined, if at all possible, by the faculty member teaching the class. If a large class size is necessary, the person teaching should have assistance in the form of teaching assistants and/or graders commensurate with the size of the class. These matters vary considerably with the format, subject matter, and goals of the class. For example, a discussion class may take more time in an online format than in a face-to-face setting, since there is no natural limit on the amount of discussion, as would be provided by the end of a class period. We recommend that departments have discussions about these matters and develop policies as part of their bylaws.

e) Ownership of Online Materials

While the AAUP contract is clear about who owns instructional material that is developed by faculty, the committee feels that it is imperative that new Director of Online Services work with the union, the campus attorney, and the administration to clarify ownership and develop a clear policy that is widely distributed to faculty regarding ownership of materials in online classes. In our research, it has become apparent that there is no clear answer to the question of ownership. Issues such as the ownership of collaboratively developed courses with instructional designers and release time or payment for the development of courses need to be explored and clarified.

Copyright Issues involved in online courses also need to be addressed and a clear policy developed and disseminated.

4. Establishing a formal structure to collect input from faculty and students on Online Learning

To ensure end users' (faculty, staff and student) input in the development of the new Center for Online Learning, the committee suggests that the Faculty Senate continue the work of this committee for three years and would like to make a motion to this effect. This ad-hoc committee should include representation from a breadth of disciplines, levels of use, and scholarly achievement. The goal of this ad-hoc committee will be to work closely with the new Director in establishing the principles of online learning and in establishing practices that support faculty development and student learning.

5. Conclusion

a) Committee Conclusions:

- The committee suggests the development of Principles for Online Learning that guide the ongoing development of the Center for Online Learning.
- The committee suggests that the economic model for online learning be re-evaluated and that student fees be fair and reflect the actual use of online services and consider financial accessibility and the long term debt load of our students.

- Curricular review of hybrid and online courses should be made at the departmental level.
- Guidelines and principles on workload should be developed in conjunction with the faculty union in collective bargaining. The committee recommends that the faculty, when possible, should be able to determine how they teach.

b) Remaining Questions

- Student issues, including access to technology support, student services, and testing services need to be addressed in policy and practice.
- Faculty development, including technology training and course development support needs to be addressed in policy and practice. The committee believes that there needs to be a strong faculty component in the development of online learning development.
- Ownership of Online Learning materials and Copyright needs to be clarified and then shared with the university community.