

Educational Policies Committee: Susan Ford

Restructuring Plan for Distance Education

The first general concern is the absence of an introduction that outlines the purpose of distance education and how that purpose serves the academic mission of SIUC. The presentation of specific mechanics for developing and delivering courses/programs is important, but should be discussed in the context of that mission.

- (1) These are academic issues and offerings; everything about DE courses and programs should report to the Assoc. Provost for Academic Affairs, NOT the Assoc. Provost for Administration.
- (2) As course/program offerings, our foremost concern throughout should be ways to assure good pedagogy and a quality educational experience. That does not seem sufficiently emphasized (see also below). What is the *role* of online-learning – is it intended to be “the same,” “different but equivalent,” or “sub par” compared to standard pedagogy?
- (3) Tuition is a complex issue. Non-resident tuition requirements may kill DE at the start. However, resident tuition may encourage on-campus non-Illinois students to take DE courses rather than brick-and-mortar classes.
- (4) Staff for the technical side is grossly insufficient at present – not enough people in ISS, how will the staff from Continuing Ed be utilized, do we have staff with the expertise/credentials, etc.
- (5) “Guidelines for consistency in course development and delivery” (pg. 4) are worrisome. Not all models work well for all purposes and courses. If there are mandatory measures for student posting, faculty / student interaction, etc., we may mandate ways that are less than effective for particular courses, mandate lower quality in some subjects, or that become quickly outdated.
- (6) Assessment needs to be watched re NCA requirements. Distance education needs to be monitored in effective ways to assure *quality* higher education including a focus on learning outcomes.
- (7) Greatest weakness of DE may be securing identity management and computer lockdown products to assure that enrolled students are the ones completing work and taking tests.
- (8) Faculty ownership of online materials is *not* addressed – this is a CRITICAL issue for faculty involvement. Faculty are not going to simply hand over a distance learning / ILP class they have developed to a GA or another faculty member to deliver, since preparation time is substantial.
- (9) It is unclear what will happen with ILP courses, which currently serve important needs for some students who like the self-paced learning and are a large portion of distance courses offered. In particular, they provide a mechanism for students to take courses that are otherwise offered rarely because of low enrollments. We see low enrollments will continue to be a problem for distance education courses offered in a non-ILP format.
- (10) It is not clear how or if faculty will be compensated for course development. If it is through “borrowing” from a fund that must be repaid by departments, then departments may become very leery and reluctant to approve course development for faculty, particularly for higher level courses or

courses outside the core (where enrollments cannot be guaranteed). Course/program development may well stall out.

- (11) Discussion of revenue distribution is not as clear and transparent as it could and should be. Need to clarify and codify in final version.
- (12) Programs are emphasized over courses – is this intentional? If departments are many courses / years from developing a full-fledged program, is the administration discouraging / not supporting the development of individual courses at this time? That is how the document reads.
- (13) Deadlines appear remarkably unrealistic. Pushing for the creation of on-line programs without adequate support staff, structure, or faculty buy-in on course development is a recipe for low-quality distance education and poor pedagogy. The likely switch from Blackboard in the near future will compound the difficulties of meeting a tight schedule. Current plan appears to rely heavily on the Committee and Sub-committees of the Distance Learning Council – who are these people? Are they all volunteers with other positions/responsibilities? A little more time may be the only resource the institution has to bring to the table at present to assure the quality we want.
- (14) Rather than knowing how much money other institutions, such as UI Springfield (pg. 3), are receiving, it would be far more informative to know what exactly they are doing in distance education, how many courses/programs, what format and style, and at what quality (and for other institutions). Distance education is not a magic bullet to solve our enrollment and revenue problems, and it requires a lot of time and effort to do it well and to offer quality. We need a model drawn from what others have done but developed to assure that SIUC is as good as the best and better than our neighbors in our delivery of distance education, not just one of the ravenous pack offering poor quality.