

Distance Education at Shippensburg University

Recommended Policies, Best Practices and State of Distance Education at Shippensburg University

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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Evolving at what seems an accelerating pace, distance education (hereafter DE) is outpacing the ability of the higher education community to fully grasp the broad dimensions of opportunities, challenges, pitfalls, and impacts of this innovation. Shippensburg University, mirroring the predicament of many other colleges and universities, is also struggling to place DE efforts appropriately relative to the vision and mission of the university.

Across higher education, many have embraced the promise that DE offers and are making concerted efforts to learn and effectively implement the associated technologies so that they too may catch the DE bandwagon. At the same time, many others question how DE “fits” in higher education and, in some cases, lump DE in with filmstrips, video, and other supposed “revolutions” in higher education.

Shippensburg illustrates this tension. DE course offerings on this campus have doubled in each of the last three years on this campus and this trend will likely continue over the next several years. To say that DE offers both promise and peril has become cliché, but the statement is not diminished. Faculty concerns about equity and fairness issues are not misplaced while at the same time, DE does offer the potential to improve upon our mission. Dialogue, debate, and conversation at the individual, departmental, and administrative levels over the role of DE at Shippensburg University is necessary to ensure that DE proceeds at an appropriate pace and in the proper direction.

What is this report about?

The purpose of this report is to broadly examine the role DE should have at Shippensburg University and to provide a framework for a wide ranging discussion concerning numerous aspects and facets of DE. These include questions as to how DE programming should be administratively configured; its proper role within the curriculum of respective college, departmental, and interdisciplinary programs; how programs and courses may best be designed, taught and evaluated; how to guarantee academic honesty; and as well as its impact on broader learning communities.

The Recommended Policies and Best Practices sections comprise bulk of this report and it is within these sections that the greatest implications for how DE is incorporated into the curricula of Shippensburg University. Furthermore, and critical to the students, faculty, and administration, what safeguards are being taken to provide that DE efforts do not compromise fairness or promote inequities within and between stakeholder groups. As stated in the committee’s charge, this report will serve as the basis for the continuation of deliberation and discussion during the 2004-05 academic year.

How is this report organized?

There are four major components to this report. This section, “**Introduction and Overview**,” serves to present the report’s purpose and outline the broader issues related to DE at this institution. The second and third components of this report, prefaced by a Summary table of “**Policies and Best Practices Table**”, are the **Policies** and **Best Practices** sections. As noted above, these are the components are the substantive bulk of the report and provide, respectively, a set of policies and a set of practices that are concrete, detailed, and carefully crafted from the feedback provided by departmental reports, comments by those who have taught DE, examination of DE enrollment data, and an extensive review of the DE literature. Finally, an “**Existing Data on DE at SU**” section is presented to provide readers an account of the current and recent DE related activities at Shippensburg University. This section also presents information on the numbers of courses offered, enrollments, and programs developed over the last several years.

Who should be concerned with DE issues at Shippensburg University?

Immediate stakeholders include faculty, students, and administrators. Departments, interdisciplinary programs, colleges, APSCUF and the student association are all institutional bodies that need take part in the dialogue concerning DE at Shippensburg University.

What are some of the underlying assumptions and broad parameters of this report?

The basic operating assumption of this committee prior to and in preparation of this report is that face-to-face on-campus courses are the delivery method of choice. The advantages of face-to-face on campus courses include: the instructor knowing the student and the student knowing the instructor; the availability of verbal and nonverbal interaction and immediate feedback; frequent student-teacher and student-student interactions; socialization; greater control of potential academic dishonesty in face-to-face courses; etc. Online DE courses should attempt to simulate these interactions as much as possible via chats, discussion boards, occasional meetings, etc. Hybrid courses (courses employing 50% or less course delivery using technologies) are perceived by faculty and students alike as being more beneficial to the teaching/learning enterprise. These underlying assumptions are widely shared.

What is Distance Education? What is the model for developing Distance Education Policy for colleges and universities?

Generally, DE may be defined as:

a formal learning activity which occurs when students and instructor are separated by geographic distance or by time, often supported by communications technology such as television, videotape, computers, Internet, or mail (*Glossary of Terms for Higher Education and Distance Learning, Indiana College Network Web Site, <http://www.icn.org/resources/glossary.html>*)

At Shippensburg University, recognizing precedent, collective bargaining agreement language, the definition of DE should be:

A course in which more than 50% of the delivery is electronic or occurs at a distance (perhaps asynchronously) is considered DE.

These definitions are not easily arrived at and are not definitive. Given the variety of assorted technologies employed (web, e-mail, video) and the spectrum of hybridization with traditional face to face instruction, it is difficult to precisely define what distance education is. An advantage of the “greater than 50% criteria” is that it appears to be the most frequently used operational definition of what DE is.

With a profusion of technologies into the already diverse setting of higher education, no one model of DE stands out for either individual courses or for entire programs. While SU is similar in profile to a number of educational institutions, especially within the SSHE, the values distinctive to our institutions behoove us to develop, adopt, and modify our own model of DE over time.

What are some distinctions of DE? What are some issues unique to DE?

Distance education presents a distinctive set of issues as well as compounding an assortment of problematic issues in higher education. A brief review of issues more pertinent to distance education in the context of Shippensburg University is offered here.

- **Unique Opportunities.** The unique aspects of online course delivery are flexibility and opportunity. Due to their asynchronous nature, online DE studies provide flexibility to students and faculty alike as they do not require that either be physically present at the university and allow for learning and teaching at any time. Thus, the employed student can earn credits and the faculty member can operate the course from practically anywhere. DE online courses offer opportunities for the student facilitating advancement toward a degree allowing students to catch up, make up, or accelerate their academic program. DE online courses and programs can also reach markets more diverse than the traditional on-

campus programming (however, this hasn't occurred at SU).

- **Learning Communities.** Learning is not imparting a given bit of knowledge in a discrete manner, but rather occurs as a community and through interaction with others. Distance education poses certain challenges to the notion of learning communities. Institutions need to grasp how distance education may be embraced to foster the idea of university as a learning community. The university is not simply the sum of its parts, but rather is a whole. Distance education needs to be configured in a manner complementing this notion.
- **General Education.** How is the mission of general education potentially impacted by DE? How can appreciation of student diversity, for example, be developed at a distance?
- **Program Quality.** Poorly conceived and improperly delivered instruction via DE may undercut or erode the quality and reputation of what are now very good programs.
- **Technical Issues with Pedagogical Implications.** The various technologies employed will define how teaching is done, with limited technology serving as the ideal or perfect. Furthermore, limited resources force institutions to necessarily limit the technologies that can be employed. What are the pedagogical implications, say, for choosing, say, Blackboard as a delivery tool as opposed to other tools, such as WebCT or E-College?
- **Financial Considerations.** Promises of greater revenues (as well as pitfalls of misplaced investments) may present challenges and even override sound programmatic or pedagogical considerations. Several institutions, in the rush to develop extensive distance education programs, saw precious resources devoured only to have the programs ended (most prominently Cornell and New York University).
- **Student Populations.** Certain student populations may become marginalized in the headlong rush for DE. Exceptional students, differently-abled students, students with limited financial capabilities, and diversity issues may be confronted with limited access (either financial or learning related) to DE offerings.
- **Equity and Fairness for Faculty.** Financial compensation should be fair between those teaching traditional and DE courses; workload equivalencies must remain balanced. One concern is that faculty will be pressured to develop 24 hour, seven day a week availability as e-mail, e-discussions, and other interactions will not be as circumscribed by the clock. Also, the potential for teaching throughout the year becomes more possible with the potential development of winter term and expansion of distance education summer courses.

- **Accreditation.** Developments in DE are leading to issues in accreditation. There are serious questions concerning how DE courses and programs comply with accreditation demand. For the time being, accrediting bodies, both for institutions (namely Middle States Commission on Higher Education) and programs are struggling on how best to consider DE initiatives. Some program accrediting bodies have fully embraced DE, while others struggle to develop a coherent policy. Regional accrediting bodies seem to be more advanced in this area than many discipline –based accrediting bodies.

What are the limitations of this report?

The committee has very little data or other evidence to weigh and analyze. While the issues are pressing, the information on DE related offerings, including instructor departmental, and student evaluation and feedback, is very limited. In part related to fair labor practices, very few instructors have provided self evaluations and very few student evaluations have been conducted. This is compounded by a number of unanswered questions. For example, are students who register for DE courses from populations different from our general population? If so, in what ways are these students distinct? Faculty dialogue arising out of departmental discussions, while addressing some pertinent issues, is recent and limited. As DE is a new and rapidly changing phenomena, this dearth of data is not unique to Shippensburg University.

POLICIES AND BEST PRACTICES TABLE

(organized topically this summarizes the Policies and Best Practices from the two sections following)

1. Institutional Structure and Support

Number	Policy	Number	Best Practice
PO1-1	The role of DE must be consistent with the university mission	BP1-1	Websites for faculty and students should be separate portals
PO1-2	DE occurs when 51% or more of the course is delivered using DE technologies	BP1-2	Support a single learning management system (Blackboard or similar delivery system)
PO1-3	No academic program at the undergraduate level should be delivered totally through DE	BP1-3	Faculty should acknowledge the intensive preparation and delivery time necessary to conduct a successful DE course. Teaching multiple DE courses concurrently may impact on the quality of teaching/learning interactions
PO1-4	Undergraduate DE should not be offered during the academic year (with exception for degree completion programs)		
PO1-5	Summer DE courses shall be included in the calculation of maximum summer teaching load		
PO1-7	DE courses must be a minimum of 5 weeks in length		
PO1-8A	The departments are responsible for determining the appropriateness of DE programming including the number of courses offered at a given time and the frequency of those offerings		
PO1-8B	DE program and course offerings should be coordinated by departments or programs in consultation with department chairs and respective college deans		
PO1-9A	Students must have a minimum of 12 credits and a 2.0 GPA		

	prior to registering for DE courses		
PO1-9B	A failed face-to-face course may not be repeated via DE		
PO1-9C	Student enrollment in multiple DE courses should be consistent with on-campus summer school policies		
PO1-10	Provide for comprehensive strategic planning of DE including instructional technology and curricular innovation and change		
PO1-11	Provide an effective marketing plan for DE		
PO 1-12	University/program DE related websites must be reviewed by the appropriate departments and faculty for content clarity and accuracy		
PO 1-13	Provide a single and supported learning management system (e.g. Blackboard) to be used by all faculty teaching DE		
PO1-14	Provide A DE online catalog describing each course, required technologies, communication methods, learning objectives and expectations, and instructor information		
PO1-15	5 year program/department reviews should address DE issues within departments and programs		
PO1-16	Qualified tenure track faculty must be offered right of first refusal to teach a DE course before adjunct faculty are hired		
PO 1-18	Profits accrued from DE offering should be distributed fairly		

2. Course Development

Number	Policy	Number	Best Practice
PO 2-1	Faculty are required to obtain the skills necessary for competent delivery of DE courses	BP2-1	Adopt a course proposal template for designing courses or programs
PO 2-2	All DE courses must be submitted to the relevant department(s) for design and content review	BP2-2	Identify and acquire existing learning resources pertinent to content materials and suitable to DE teaching methods
PO 2-3	DE related curriculum changes (including DE course and program proposals) should comply with the accepted university curriculum review process outlined by the University Curriculum Committee	BP2-3	Conduct a pilot run of a course and/or initiate an expert external review
		BP2-4	The departments should consider which student populations can best be served through DE offerings

3. Teaching and Learning

Number	Policy	Number	Best Practice
PO3-1	It is the policy of the university to expect academic honesty in all learning environments	BP3-1	Adopt efforts to address academic honesty
PO3-2	Course dialogue is essential to promoting learning and active engagement of the student via analysis, synthesis, application, evaluation, problem solving and critical thinking	BP3-2	Faculty should create multiple means of faculty-to-student and student-to-student interaction through the use of face-to-face meetings, discussion boards, chats, collaboration through group projects, and written assignments
PO3-3	Constructive evaluation, assessment, and comment must be provided in a timely manner	BP3-3	Faculty should consider their timing and method of response to queries in light of the students' ability to progress toward assignment understanding and completion

4. Course Structure

Number	Policy	Number	Best Practice
		BP4-1	Provide a detailed syllabus
		BP4-2	Provide ongoing operating parameters of the DE course
		BP4-3	Provide clarification of technical means and timing of student/faculty and student/student interaction and communication
		BP4-4	Design balanced instructional activities
		BP4-5	Develop course rubrics
		BP4-6	Provide detailed and repeated instructions for each assignment
		BP4-7	Establish a routine to assist in time management
		BP4-8	Foster group dynamics

5. Student Support

Number	Policy	Number	Best Practice
PO5-1	All courses must provide a statement of technical requirements and student acknowledgement of those demands should occur prior to the start of the course	BP5-1	Clarify and enhance student technical skills PRIOR TO registration
PO5-2A	The university should assess students' technical competency prior to DE course registration	BP5-2	Facilitate goal setting
PO5-2B	The university should post checklists requiring students to respond to questions concerning the suitability of DE courses to their learning styles and academic motivation	BP5-3	Create course materials in a printer friendly format
PO5-3A	Advisement by faculty to students considering DE courses should address challenges to learning in the electronic environment	BP5-4	Provide online assessment and skills practice
PO5-3B	Enrollment in summer courses should require advisor release		
PO5-4	Provide learning management system trainings and technical support to students		

6. Faculty Support

Number	Policy	Number	Best Practice
PO6-1	Create a faculty support mentor system administered by faculty	BP6-1	Training provided to faculty should utilize a variety of instructional approaches
PO6-2	Provide technical and systems support for faculty	BP6-2	Create and distribute reusable templates
PO6-3	Ensure faculty have adequate computing resources to support teaching DE	BP6-3	Provide faculty with a sample DE course
PO6-4	Provide adequate faculty development opportunities		
PO6-5	Ensure faculty access to instructional design support		

7. Evaluation and Assessment

Number	Policy	Number	Best Practice
PO7-1	All DE courses and programs must be evaluated for program and course quality, effectiveness, and efficiency	BP7-1	Departmental guidelines should be used (see appendix) to clarify the appropriateness of courses for DE
PO7-2	A comprehensive evaluation of DE efforts must review the infrastructure of the DE program, including the learning-management system, administrative/management system, and the student/faculty support system and their integration	BP7-2	Departments should meet periodically to review DE program evaluation and assessment results and consider needed modifications
PO7-3	A mechanism for student evaluation of DE courses should be consistent with Article 42F of the CBA	BP7-3	Using a variety of assessment types may assist in authenticating student outcomes
PO7-4	An evaluative comparison between our institution and other SSHE schools, as well as other comparable institutions, should be conducted		

PO7-5	Assessment and revision are an integral part of DE courses. Evidence of assessment must be provided prior to faculty receiving preparation compensation when the same course is taught for more than 3 years		
PO7-6	Each department should have policies and procedures through which they can evaluate the administration of their DE courses and programs		
PO7-7	Evaluation of graduate programs should occur on a regularly scheduled basis. The operating department should define outcome criteria relevant to program evaluation		
PO7-8	The graduate dean must oversee graduate program evaluation efforts		

POLICIES

The following proposed policies are presented to insure that there is a coherent set of relationships between participants responsible for DE including administrators, departments, faculty and students.

1. Institutional Structure and Support

POLICY 1-1: THE ROLE OF DE MUST BE CONSISTENT WITH THE UNIVERSITY MISSION

Discussion

It is vital to clarify the role of DE and to define that role within the parameters of the university mission and vision enabling the university to develop curricula (courses, programs, and degrees) thus increasing cooperation and collaboration.

POLICY 1-2: DE OCCURS WHEN 51% OR MORE OF THE COURSE IS DELIVERED USING DE TECHNOLOGIES

Discussion

It's important to differentiate between web-enhanced and DE courses and to guarantee that electronic delivery does not substitute or replace face-to-face interactions in campus-based courses. Non-DE courses wherein more than 10% of in-seat time is replaced with technology based activities should be reviewed by the department. "All university classes meet as stipulated in the official university calendar. Any adjustment of class meeting times or dates should be made only after consultation with the department chairperson and the dean of the appropriate college."(Faculty Manual, 2004). According to the CBA "each hour of scheduled lecture is considered a workload hour."

POLICY 1-3: NO ACADEMIC PROGRAM AT THE UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL SHOULD BE DELIVERED ENTIRELY THROUGH DE

POLICY 1-4: UNDERGRADUATE DE COURSES SHOULD NOT BE OFFERED DURING THE ACADEMIC YEAR (WITH EXCEPTION FOR DEGREE COMPLETION PROGRAMS)

Discussion

Courses are only a component of a university education. A liberal arts education encompasses participation in a wider learning community that may not only accomplish the furthering of one's professional development, but also social and human development. Furthermore, engagement with the university community encourages a legacy of involvement, activism, and appreciation of diversity that may extend to or incorporate the wider regional community and alumni. These community relationships will serve the university and ultimately the students in a fashion much richer than the courses alone. Such relations are crucial to the development of internship opportunities, research programs, guest presentations, or financial contributions. The professional and personal bonding established by faculty and student in a face-to-face environment provides opportunities for long-term relationships as students become alumni and continue to provide financial and leadership support. DE is not conducive to the broader mission of the university. In support of this policy, Middle States, the AFT and the NEA, in their discussion of DE, assert that the optimal form of educational delivery is face-to-face learning.

POLICY 1-5: SUMMER DE COURSES SHALL BE INCLUDED IN THE CALCULATION OF MAXIMUM SUMMER TEACHING LOAD

Discussion

Teaching concurrent DE courses does not lend itself to quality teaching/learning interactions. Faculty workload should correspond with the campus based summer teaching load policies. The dependence on technology and time lapses in communication within the DE environment between instructor and student places additional responsibilities on course development and execution.

With new technologies and efforts to foster contact, interaction, and academic engagement, faculty have become accessible through a variety of means (e-mail, internet chat, asynchronous discussion threads, etc.) and around the clock and calendar (weekends, between terms, additional terms). While DE may open avenues of student engagement, every effort must be made to maintain faculty workloads that are consistent with high quality teaching and the provision of research opportunities. That is, faculty should not be obligated to unreasonable accessibility (24 hours, 7 days) and teaching assignments (teaching summer and potential winter terms in addition to the standard fall and spring assignments).

POLICY 1-7: DE COURSES MUST BE A MINIMUM OF 5 WEEKS IN LENGTH

Discussion

DE courses should be offered for no less than 5 weeks and may be longer if pedagogically appropriate. Adequate time is required for students to absorb, comprehend and provide feedback to the instructor. Likewise, faculty also require ample time to provide instruction and feedback to students.

POLICY 1-8A: THE DEPARTMENTS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR DETERMINING THE APPROPRIATENESS OF DE PROGRAMMING INCLUDING THE NUMBER OF COURSES OFFERED AT A GIVEN TIME AND THE FREQUENCY OF THOSE OFFERINGS

POLICY 1-8B: DE PROGRAM AND COURSE OFFERINGS SHOULD BE COORDINATED BY DEPARTMENTS OR PROGRAMS IN CONSULTATION WITH DEPARTMENT CHAIRS AND RESPECTIVE COLLEGE DEAN

Discussion

Departmental coordination and dialogue may be used to determine the appropriateness of course content and programmatic coherence thus allowing faculty and chairs to more effectively plan course and program offerings. Courses should be constructed by departments to “fulfill department specific pedagogical needs” (Pirani, 2004).

Coordinated planning and control of course offerings will provide more effective faculty staffing. The offering of DE courses has the potential to draw from the traditional on-campus population resulting in an imbalance of the faculty complement during the fall and spring semesters. DE course offerings should be closely coordinated through the appropriate deans and department chairs. These institutional policies may streamline procedures across administrative offices.

POLICY 1-9A: STUDENTS MUST HAVE A MINIMUM OF 12 CREDITS AND A 2.0 GPA PRIOR TO REGISTERING FOR DE COURSES

POLICY 1-9B: A FAILED FACE-TO-FACE COURSE MAY NOT BE REPEATED VIA DE

POLICY 1-9C: STUDENT ENROLLMENT IN MULTIPLE DE COURSES SHOULD BE CONSISTENT WITH ON-CAMPUS SUMMER SCHOOL POLICIES

Discussion

Because DE requires a large self-directed component, students must demonstrate a record of academic success prior to engaging in DE online courses. Students should be socialized into the culture of scholarship and demonstrate academic motivation and adequate learning skills before being allowed to enroll in on-line DE courses.

Students at risk including freshmen, students with poor academic standing or who have failed a course need greater interaction with the course instructor to succeed. *In the College of Business DE survey (September 2004), 65% of the faculty respondents indicated that a student who failed a course should NOT be permitted to retake the course online.

DE courses are labor intensive and require additional technologies and pedagogic approaches not necessarily present in face-to-face instructional environments. As all summer courses are compressed into briefer sessions, taking two courses in a summer session is viewed as a full load.

POLICY 1-10: PROVIDE FOR COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIC PLANNING OF DE INCLUDING INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY, CURRICULAR INNOVATION, AND CHANGE

Discussion

The university should have a coordinated plan for DE reflective of its stated mission; its status and direction. Course and program development and offerings should follow a sound rationale including resource availability and pedagogical adaptation (courses fitting departmental programmatic needs). Adequate planning and funding are necessary in order to support faculty and students with the required training and delivery technologies.

POLICY 1-11: PROVIDE AN EFFECTIVE MARKETING PLAN FOR DE

Discussion

The success of DE is a direct result of its marketing program. Target audiences must be identified and resources committed to adequately reach these potential markets (niche audiences such as IT, businesses, social agencies).

POLICY 1-12: UNIVERSITY/PROGRAM DE RELATED WEBSITES MUST BE REVIEWED BY THE APPROPRIATE DEPARTMENTS AND FACULTY FOR CONTENT CLARITY AND ACCURACY

Discussion

As websites are the primary gateway to information concerning programs, course information, registration information, etc., a website review process must be articulated. A clear avenue for regularly correcting, updating and improving the website information must be provided. The content specialists for programs and courses are the faculty teaching the courses.

POLICY 1-13: PROVIDE A SINGLE AND SUPPORTED LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (E.G., BLACKBOARD) TO BE USED BY ALL FACULTY TEACHING DE

Discussion

A single learning management system provides numerous benefits including cost efficient operation; common interface and procedures for faculty and student; and better focused technical support.

POLICY 1-14: PROVIDE A DE CATALOG ONLINE DESCRIBING EACH COURSE, REQUIRED TECHNOLOGIES, COMMUNICATION METHODS, LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTATIONS, AND INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Discussion

A DE online catalog clarifies expectations concerning student technical skills requirements, equipment needs, time commitments, and other issues specific to DE. Students interested in registering for DE courses should have all relevant information about the DE related course particulars provided prior to registration.

POLICY 1-15: FIVE YEAR PROGRAM/DEPARTMENT REVIEWS SHOULD ADDRESS DE ISSUES WITHIN DEPARTMENTS AND PROGRAMS

Discussion

Since DE is a reality at Shippensburg University, departments need to discuss and plan for the opportunities, impacts, and relevance of DE to their programs. Departments must articulate a policy concerning DE.

POLICY 1-16: QUALIFIED TENURE-TRACK FACULTY MUST BE OFFERED THE RIGHT OF FIRST REFUSAL TO TEACH A DE COURSE BEFORE ADJUNCT FACULTY ARE HIRED

Discussion

Since DE is not viewed as a complete degree program at the undergraduate level, there is no compelling reason to offer a course at a given time if a Shippensburg University faculty member is not available to teach it. Extant graduate programs have sufficient time to plan faculty/staffing resources. Instructors for specialized courses should only be hired with the knowledge and approval of the department affected.

POLICY 1-18: PROFITS ACCRUED FROM DE OFFERINGS SHOULD BE DISTRIBUTED FAIRLY

Discussion

Consistent with current practice, 5% of profits generated from a class, after expenses, is distributed to the department of the teaching faculty member. Professional development opportunities should be supported through profits earned via DE.

2. Course Development

POLICY 2-1: FACULTY ARE REQUIRED TO OBTAIN THE SKILLS NECESSARY FOR COMPETENT DELIVERY OF DE COURSES

Discussion

Faculty training is necessary for effective course management and delivery. Faculty should undergo appropriate training in the use of technologies; participate in orientation sessions; pass a campus-provided course in Blackboard; and attend pertinent in-house training workshops. Inadequate training will likely limit the effectiveness of DE.

POLICY 2-2: ALL DE COURSES MUST BE SUBMITTED TO THE RELEVANT DEPARTMENT(S) FOR DESIGN AND CONTENT REVIEW

Discussion

A DE course (new or existing) must be considered at the departmental level in terms of both content and appropriateness of delivery via DE technologies. Review at the departmental level, appropriately documented in departmental meeting or sub-committee meeting minutes, allows for wider faculty input and consideration.

POLICY 2-3: DE RELATED CURRICULUM CHANGES (INCLUDING DE COURSE AND PROGRAM PROPOSALS) SHOULD COMPLY WITH THE ACCEPTED UNIVERSITY CURRICULUM REVIEW PROCESS OUTLINED BY THE UNIVERSITY CURRICULUM COMMITTEE

Discussion

An established, representative and deliberative curriculum review process is already present on this campus. This review process follows from university governance guidelines, the collective bargaining process, and incorporates the voice of all stakeholders. See worksheet in Appendices B.

3. Teaching and Learning

POLICY 3-1: IT IS THE POLICY OF THE UNIVERSITY TO EXPECT ACADEMIC HONESTY IN ALL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Discussion

As DE online courses have a unique potential for academic dishonesty, Faculty should attempt to create an instructional environment to enhance, promote and enforce honesty.

POLICY 3-2: COURSE DIALOGUE IS ESSENTIAL TO PROMOTING LEARNING AND ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT OF THE STUDENT VIA ANALYSIS, SYNTHESIS, APPLICATION, EVALUATION, PROBLEM SOLVING, AND CRITICAL THINKING

Discussion

Interaction between faculty and students, and students and students, is essential to the teaching/learning process and may be facilitated in a variety of ways (e-mail, chats, discussion boards and face-to-face meetings when appropriate). Research has shown that satisfaction with DE courses is greater when the students and professors meet occasionally throughout the course (hybrid courses).

POLICY: 3-3: CONSTRUCTIVE EVALUATION, ASSESSMENT, AND COMMENT MUST BE PROVIDED IN A TIMELY MANNER

Discussion

Given the importance of feedback, student/professor interaction, and the realities of the DE environment the instructor must carefully design opportunities for feedback in his/her course. Some idea of expected response time and professor's availability online or in his/her office (office hours) should be provided to the students.

4. Course Structure (see Best Practices)

A number of best practices are suitable for developing and implementing courses. No policies are recommended, however, as they may impinge upon academic freedom.

5. Student Support

POLICY 5-1: ALL COURSES MUST PROVIDE A STATEMENT OF TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS AND STUDENT ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THOSE DEMANDS SHOULD OCCUR PRIOR TO THE START OF THE COURSE

Discussion

The hardware and software requirements of any DE course (or program) should be clearly conveyed in written form, either with the use of a statement or checklist, and in a manner that requires student acknowledgment of these requirements. This conveyance (regardless of form) should also be presented online and in a manner that accessible to student review. (See Policy 1-14).

Some courses require high speed internet connections and certain minimum computer processor speeds to support the use of video and/or audio clips, and other online materials. Students must be made aware of hardware needs that will guarantee an appropriate degree of access to course materials.

POLICY 5-2A: THE UNIVERSITY SHOULD ASSESS STUDENTS' TECHNICAL COMPETENCY PRIOR TO DE COURSE REGISTRATION

POLICY 5-2B: THE UNIVERSITY SHOULD POST CHECKLISTS REQUIRING STUDENTS TO RESPOND TO QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE SUITABILITY OF DE COURSES TO THEIR LEARNING STYLES AND ACADEMIC MOTIVATION

Discussion

Student acknowledgement ensures that they are aware of the self-direction, time and technical demands in taking and succeeding in an on-line DE course. Faculty expertise is best applied to course content rather than course-required technical skills.

POLICY 5-3A: ADVISEMENT BY FACULTY TO STUDENTS CONSIDERING DE COURSES SHOULD ADDRESS CHALLENGES TO LEARNING IN THE ELECTRONIC ENVIRONMENT

POLICY 5-3B: ENROLLMENT IN SUMMER COURSES SHOULD REQUIRE ADVISOR RELEASE

Discussion

In the student advisement process, faculty must communicate to their advisees the additional and unique challenges of DE learning. The advisor must individually assess a student's technological and academic readiness to take a DE course and their ability to address time management concerns.

POLICY 5-4: PROVIDE LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM TRAINING AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

Discussion

Since the online learning environment is based upon a technical infrastructure, it is critical to provide support services for students to guarantee success in the online learning environment. Adequate technology support is one of the critical areas of success for online learning programs. Long-term success of students in the online learning environment is dependent upon their skills and competencies as learners. The institution's obligation to provide student orientation to the delivery environment is paramount to that success.

6. FACULTY SUPPORT

POLICY 6-1: CREATE A FACULTY SUPPORT MENTOR SYSTEM ADMINISTERED BY FACULTY

Discussion

Faculty experienced in DE development and delivery can provide various types of assistance to those new to this environment. Five faculty members (Arts, Business, Education, Human Services, and Science) should serve as consultants to their college colleagues on instructional issues and questions. These mentors could also serve as consultants for course development and review. Tested classroom strategies, both successful and unsuccessful, can be disseminated to those faculty in similar academic content environments.

POLICY 6-2: PROVIDE TECHNICAL AND SYSTEMS SUPPORT FOR FACULTY

Discussion

Provide adequate faculty development opportunities concerning the use of DE technologies, teaching methods, and strategies.

Since the online learning environment is based upon a technical infrastructure, it is critical to provide accessible and available services for faculty to support success in the online learning environment leaving faculty free to focus on course content and teaching.

POLICY 6-3: ENSURE FACULTY HAVE ADEQUATE COMPUTING RESOURCES TO SUPPORT TEACHING DE COURSES

Discussion

Faculty may need additional computing resources for select courses over and above the standard demands for DE. For example, some courses may demand greater processing power for video; access from the field (e.g., field-based lecture and other remote location teaching activities); or unique hardware and/or software components.

POLICY 6-4: PROVIDE ADEQUATE FACULTY DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR DE

Discussion

The institution should provide for faculty development needs in the area of new pedagogic and technical skills required for the design and delivery of online course material.

POLICY 6-5: ENSURE FACULTY ACCESS TO INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN SUPPORT

Discussion

Provide faculty with adequate and accessible instructional support for creating and delivering online courses. Constructing a consistent and coherent plan for providing core support services at the institutional level alleviates, for faculty, unmanageable learning curves associated with online delivery methods, decreases course development time, and better utilizes institutional resources.

7. Evaluation and Assessment

POLICY 7-1: ALL DE COURSES AND PROGRAMS MUST BE EVALUATED FOR PROGRAM AND COURSE QUALITY, EFFECTIVENESS, AND EFFICIENCY

Discussion

Both formative and summative evaluations of DE should be designed to gather information from students, support staff, and faculty. Evaluation of DE efforts should include or address enrollment data, student assessment and performance, student characteristics, and student attitudes toward and satisfaction with DE courses in general and with the various technologies employed, etc. These types of evaluation:

- a) Allows for mid-course corrections, which reduces workload at the end of the course;
- b) Provides the stakeholders with opportunities to address problem areas and suggest additional resources.

POLICY 7-2: A COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION OF DE EFFORTS MUST REVIEW THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE DE PROGRAM, INCLUDING THE LEARNING-MANAGEMENT SYSTEM, ADMINISTRATIVE/MANAGEMENT SYSTEM, AND THE STUDENT/ FACULTY SUPPORT SYSTEM AND THEIR INTEGRATION

Discussion

A quality DE system is holistic in its approach wherein the learning-management system, the administrative-management system and the student-faculty system are evaluated individually and collectively. Templates have been developed for the purpose of DE evaluation. Both faculty and students should be surveyed as to the effectiveness of various information and delivery systems (Blackboard, websites, registration), training, support, etc.

POLICY 7-3: A MECHANISM FOR STUDENT EVALUATION OF DE COURSES MUST BE CONSISTENT WITH ARTICLE 42F OF THE CBA

Discussion

To ascertain whether the DE program/course is effectively designed and is meeting its objectives, the program/course must be evaluated by students. No program or course can be effectively improved without feedback from the students. According to Art.42, Section F, Part 2, "for distance education courses , an appropriate student evaluation instrument shall be developed by local APSCUF, the University management, and the appropriate student government body as designated by the President". In addition, Art. 42, Section F, Part 3 states, "No probationary faculty member or any candidate for tenure or promotion shall be evaluated on his/her teaching of distance education courses during the term of this agreement."

POLICY 7-4: AN EVALUATIVE COMPARISON BETWEEN OUR INSTITUTION AND OTHER PASSHE SCHOOLS, AS WELL AS OTHER COMPARABLE INSTITUTIONS, SHOULD BE CONDUCTED

Discussion

Shippensburg's DE efforts should be evaluated in the context of other institutions' DE initiatives. Administrators and faculty responsible for DE programs must keep current in the research in this area so they may more effectively modify and plan for future programs. This is especially important in the rapidly changing educational landscape of DE.

POLICY 7-5: ASSESSMENT AND REVISION ARE AN INTEGRAL PART OF DE COURSES. EVIDENCE OF COURSE ASSESSMENT MUST BE PROVIDED PRIOR TO FACULTY RECEIVING PREPARATION COMPENSATION WHEN THE SAME COURSE IS TAUGHT FOR MORE THAN 3 YEARS

Discussion

The course revision cycle is a real and necessary process that assures that each course and program undergo continual improvement. The purpose of additional compensation is to support the efforts of faculty to revise and refine previously developed courses.

POLICY 7-6: EACH DEPARTMENT SHOULD HAVE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES THROUGH WHICH THEY CAN EVALUATE THE ADMINISTRATION OF THEIR DE COURSES AND PROGRAMS

Discussion

There should be departmental policies to address:

- Which courses may be most suitably or not suitably provided via DE;
- How it is determined who will develop and teach a particular DE course or section of a course;
- The periodic review of the process of deliberating, approving, and revising curricula.

POLICY 7-7: EVALUATION OF GRADUATE PROGRAMS SHOULD OCCUR ON A REGULARLY SCHEDULED BASIS. THE OPERATING DEPARTMENT SHOULD DEFINE OUTCOME CRITERIA RELEVANT TO PROGRAM EVALUATION

Discussion

The efficacy of offering a large component of an academic program via DE should be evaluated. According to Art.42, Section F, Part 2,”for distance education courses, an appropriate student evaluation instrument shall be developed by local APSCUF, the University management, and the appropriate student government body as designated by the President”. In addition, Art. 42, Section F, Part 3 states, “No probationary faculty member or any candidate for tenure or promotion shall be evaluated on his/her teaching of distance education courses during the term of this agreement.”

POLICY 7-8: THE GRADUATE DEAN MUST OVERSEE GRADUATE PROGRAM EVALUATION EFFORTS

Discussion

Due to the nature of interdepartmental and inter-college programs, the office of the graduate dean is the appropriate body through which consistent evaluation and assessment must be actively coordinated. This process should include collection, data analysis, and discussion within the appropriate venue for program review and modification.

BEST PRACTICES

The Best Practices document presents “best practices” in Distance Education (DE) with regard to methods, models, strategies, and implementation. This document is intended as a manual guide for use by individual faculty, academic departments and administration,. The best practices cited are based on an extensive review of the literature and careful consideration of departmental and administrative comment along with consideration of the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). The organization and format of these Best Practices for Distance Education corresponds with the organization of the Recommended Policies Report.

1. Institutional Structure and Support

This category offers best practice recommendations that provide overall support to all DE users.

BP 1-1: WEBSITES FOR STUDENTS AND FACULTY SHOULD BE SEPARATE PORTALS

Discussion

There are two audiences for DE content on a campus. Each audience has a distinct set of informational requirements and other needs. These audiences are the faculty who develop and deliver DE curriculum and the students who enroll or consider enrolling in DE courses. Given the distinctive sets of needs, two websites should be developed (as opposed to the current one) to best address the requirements of each audience.

Knowledge unique to distance education should be directed to those who wish to enroll and to those who develop and deliver the course content. On their website, students should be informed as to the specific expectations and requirements of DE and the DE course of interest in order to better determine its completion feasibility. Elements can include: posting course descriptions, course requirements, course timetable and other informational items on the web prior to scheduling activities. The presentation of these elements must be standardized as a part of the online catalog.

On their website, faculty should be informed of course proposal and development timetables and procedures, compensation information and mechanisms, contractual obligations, course assessment template, policies, best practices, online resources, the mentoring program, links to the instructional and technical supports, etc.

Separation of sites will help:

- Reduce content overlap
- Reduce confusion
- Provide quicker and easier access to responsibilities and timetables
- Facilitate student advising and scheduling
- Provide specific course requirements enabling students to more effectively determine their ability to meet these objectives,

Also:

- Information will be easier to locate for both students and faculty.
- Potentially reduces the number of later course withdrawals as well as ensuring potential seats are not consumed by “no shows” thus preventing others from enrolling due to course enrollments caps.

Online activities can raise the accessibility of campus support services. When Web pages are designed for telecourses, they typically contain hyperlinks to resource centers around campus. These resource centers, such as counseling, registration, computer labs, technical help desks, the library, testing center, and bookstore, provide valuable services to distance learners who are geographically separated from the campus. Both the Web and BBSs can direct online users to these information repositories. (Telecourses, BBSs, and the World Wide Web by Linda Bruce - <http://www.pbs.org/als/agenda/articles/enhance.html>)

BP 1-2: SUPPORT A SINGLE LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (BLACKBOARD OR SIMILAR DELIVERY SYSTEM)

Discussion

Access to a single learning management system and the supports to keep it running effectively streamlines the DE process for both students and faculty. Many operational tasks can be conducted automatically by the LMS. Recordkeeping within the LMS enables faculty to more effectively manage their workload. Having a single LMS allows students and faculty to become more readily proficient in its use.

Providing a single learning management system encompasses more than just having the system up on the server. At Shippensburg a 24/7 help desk is available for use.

The system and its supports should include some or all of the following features:

- Standardized, centralized, and electronic system available in a shared environment
- Student assignment section
- Online grade book
- Capability for electronic, quantitative and qualitative comments
- Security features

This single system:

- Helps the instructor to stay oriented to each student’s progress, as well as to the students as a group
- Monitors progress of all students efficiently
- Helps to identify problems and facilitate intervention at critical times
- Provides documentation of student performance
- System security instills student confidence
- A standard delivery structure facilitates student adaptation to the online environment for the first and subsequent courses.

BP1-3: FACULTY SHOULD ACKNOWLEDGE THE INTENSIVE PREPARATION AND DELIVERY TIME NECESSARY TO CONDUCT A SUCCESSFUL DE COURSE. TEACHING MULTIPLE DE COURSES CONCURRENTLY MAY IMPACT ON THE QUALITY OF TEACHING/LEARNING INTERACTIONS

Discussion

Teaching more than one DE course at a time differs from teaching two concurrent on campus courses- Logistical demands and constraints in the online environment are extensive. Teaching a DE course in a 5-8 week period requires constant attention from the faculty member. Not only does one need to monitor and respond to students' comments and questions, but grading and providing timely feedback is also necessary. Due to these factors, faculty should remember that teaching multiple DE courses concurrently may impact on the quality of teaching/learning interactions.

2. Course Development

BP 2-1: ADOPT A COURSE PROPOSAL TEMPLATE FOR DESIGNING COURSES OR PROGRAMS

Discussion

The course proposal model serves as a blueprint specifying the primary components of the course. The course proposal model should include the following:

- A definition of audience, objectives, learning outcomes, and exit competencies
- A rationale for how the delivery mode meets the course objectives
- An explanation of how the learning process will be implemented
- An explanation of how the learning process will be evaluated
- An explanation of the revision process
- An explanation of how the course addresses the department's programmatic needs

A template:

- Develops a shared understanding of the process of DE education
- Highlights and discovers problems at an early stage
- Saves time by defining what is going to be worked on and when
- Provides the structure for a reusable model

Departments can use this template to review courses before approval for online delivery.

BP 2-2: IDENTIFY AND ACQUIRE EXISTING LEARNING RESOURCES PERTINENT TO CONTENT MATERIALS AND SUITABLE TO DE TEACHING METHODS

Discussion

Identifying and acquiring learning resources assists faculty in incorporating existing materials rather than writing new content for their courses. Existing learning resources include the following:

- Web site links
- Content from textbooks
- Content from periodicals, library, or government materials
- Computerized learning materials (PowerPoint presentations, graphics, etc.) organized so that they can be archived for easy access and reusability

This practice:

- Requires fewer content development resources
- Provides a means for addressing missing elements of a course
- Ensures consistency in content delivery
- Reduces copyright problems

Incorporating existing learning materials requires time and thoroughness at the course development stage but when materials are archived (*with* proper permissions system in place), the long-term benefits are worth the initial investment.

BP 2-3: CONDUCT A PILOT RUN OF A COURSE AND/OR INITIATE AN EXPERT EXTERNAL REVIEW

Discussion

Conducting a pilot run or having a course reviewed by a faculty expert (additional to the author) helps to identify and correct potential problems.

This practice may:

- Reduce student and faculty confusion at the beginning of the course
- Be a relatively inexpensive strategy to implement
- Increase student confidence

This best practice requires additional resources but can serve to identify and eliminate problems before the student experiences them, thereby reducing faculty workload in error management and correction.

BP 2-4: THE DEPARTMENTS SHOULD CONSIDER WHICH STUDENT POPULATIONS CAN BEST BE SERVED THROUGH DE OFFERINGS

Discussion

Offering upper division DE courses provides a student body that is familiar with the departmental (major) content and has had successful academic experience. Upper division students are knowledgeable of the faculty and the departmental requirements. Faculty may already know many of the students enrolling in the courses from previous campus-based sections thus facilitating the online interactions.

Other select groups of students, such as honors, non-traditional and graduate students may also be more likely to be successful at DE due to their academic motivation and time management skills.

“The fact that distance education may be a good option for teaching a particular course, or set of courses, does not automatically mean that it is acceptable to offer an entire undergraduate degree program, two-year or four-year, without providing students in-class experience.”

Source: Distance Education: Guidelines for Good Practice, A report prepared by the Higher Education Program and Policy Council of the American Federation of Teachers.

“While an online method of education can be a highly effective alternative medium of education for the mature, self-disciplined student, it is an inappropriate learning environment for more dependent learners. Online asynchronous education gives students control over their learning experience, and allows for flexibility of study schedules for non traditional students; however, this places a greater responsibility on the student. In order to successfully participate in an online program, student must be well organized, self-motivated, and possess a high degree of time management skills in order to keep up with the pace of the course. For these reasons, online education is not appropriate for younger students...”

Source: <http://illinois.online.uillinois.edu/IONresources/onlineLearning/weaknesses.asp>

3. Teaching/Learning Process

BP: 3-1: ADOPT EFFORTS TO ENCOURAGE ACADEMIC HONESTY

Discussion

The following suggestions may help with addressing academic dishonesty:

- The use of honor statements
- Identify the institutional policy for dishonest behavior and the consequences of violating them
- Define academically inappropriate behavior in detail
- Carefully monitor student activity or lack thereof on the website
- Vary the type of assessment tool used throughout the class
- Describe technology available to ensure compliance with honesty codes - i.e. TURNITIN
- Create a fictitious student account to monitor student-to-student email regarding assignments
- Have proctored exams

BP 3-2: FACULTY SHOULD CREATE MULTIPLE MEANS OF FACULTY-TO-STUDENT AND STUDENT-TO-STUDENT INTERACTION THROUGH THE USE OF FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS, DISCUSSION BOARDS, CHATS, COLLABORATION THROUGH GROUP PROJECTS, AND WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

Discussion

Student interaction with faculty and other students is an essential characteristic of the teaching/learning process and may be facilitated in a variety of ways (e-mail, chats, discussion boards and face-to-face meetings when appropriate). Methods of course dialogue that include some form of face-to-face interaction (i.e. hybrid courses) are the preferred model for DE. Integrating e-discussion participation into the course requirements is vital to motivate students fully.

“Online learning has its most promising potential in the high synergy represented by active dialog among the participants, one of the most important sources of learning in a Virtual Classroom.”

Source: <http://illinois.online.uillinois.edu/IONresources/onlineLearning/weaknesses.asp>

“Active learning replaces what is often a passive experience initiated and controlled by the instructor. Furthermore, (asynchronous) textual reproduction of interaction through an electronic medium reduces participatory bias.” (Williams and Murphy 2002:22).

“E-discussion groups have been found to promote several important pedagogical values, including participation, involvement, and equality.” (Williams and Murphy, 2002:22)

BP: 3-3 FACULTY SHOULD CONSIDER THEIR TIMING AND METHODS OF RESPONSE TO QUERIES, IN LIGHT OF THE STUDENT’S ABILITY TO PROGRESS TOWARD ASSIGNMENT UNDERSTANDING AND COMPLETION

Discussion

Due to the nature of DE, (re: anytime anywhere) faculty can expect to receive e-mails or voice messages, unless response time and methods are specified in the syllabus. The response times should take into account length of the course (shorter courses require quicker response time) and other responsibilities of students and faculty. The methods of response might consider types of questions and concerns to be addressed, i.e. generic questions/answers of interest to all students could be posted on discussion board for everyone to read. Response times and methods should be clearly stated on the syllabus.

4. Course Structure

BP 4-1: PROVIDE A DETAILED SYLLABUS

Discussion

Providing a detailed syllabus serves as a valuable tool to communicate assignments, supplemental readings, grading, ethics, prerequisites, schedule, goals, and learning objectives to the student. In particular, the student can identify activities that may require new skills or extra time. The syllabus should include a detailed explanation of the technical skills necessary to complete the course successfully (see BP6-2 for template ideas). A detailed course schedule with projected time requirements for successful completion of course should also be included.

A detailed syllabus aids faculty by reducing the number of student queries on the aforementioned issues and provides an easily accessible central location for important information such that students can easily refer to it throughout their course experience.

A more complete course syllabus can be created by the faculty member after all course development activities have been finalized rather than as a first step.

The following is a list of syllabus elements adapted from Northern State University (S. Dakota) guidelines for faculty which may be useful in an on-line course syllabus:

(http://www.northern.edu/distance_ed/euc_guidelines.html)

- A course description from the catalogue.
- A clear and detailed listing of assignments.
- A clear identification of both online and offline activities.
- A statement of expectations if students will be involved in online discussion groups.
- Course expectations or outcome objectives that are linked to the course description
- Internet and WWW information, with links to various sites
- Information on course materials and textbooks including where to find them
- The use of meaningful words or phrases.
- Course materials: Information on required text books, other print materials, journals, computer software, laboratory materials or special tools, and any other items needed for the course.
- Course schedule: Listing of lessons titles, dates, readings/activities, assignments, due dates for assignments, and exam dates.
- Late policies including handling of situations where technical difficulties prevent submission of assignments.
- Grading: Description of elements (i.e., interaction, assignments, exams) contributing toward students' grades. Listing of how many points or percentages each component is worth; how, when and where each will occur and how they will be administered or sent to instructor; listing of grading scale, using points or percentages. Password protected on-line grade book link if appropriate.
- Tips on how to succeed in the course.

The following best practices may be referred to in the syllabus but should be reinforced throughout the course

BP 4-2: PROVIDE ONGOING OPERATING PARAMETERS OF THE DE COURSE

Discussion

Defining the operating parameters of the course including interactions between student/student and student/faculty is important for emphasizing timelines and responsibilities in order for students to effectively manage their workload and successfully complete all assigned interactive tasks. Establishing and communicating these parameters and expectations facilitates both student and faculty workload management. Faculty may wish to consider: How are interactions assessed? What opportunities for interaction are afforded? How quickly and regularly is feedback given? Are there standards for interactivity? How widely used are discussion boards, chats, etc.? What is done to insure that students interact on a regular basis?

Clarifications, adjustments, and refinements to course materials are often needed after the course begins.

Things to consider:

- Proactively address requirements for students. Assume there will still be questions.
- Establishes rules for group work and pacing. DE will be new to most students
- Enable students to plan ahead by giving them time frames for the entire course.
- Assign responsibility of self-monitoring and self-managing course work to students

Example: "The means of communication between students will be through use of e-mail (primary), along with telephone and office visits (during office hours)."

BP 4-3: PROVIDE CLARIFICATION OF TECHNICAL MEANS AND TIMING OF STUDENT/FACULTY AND STUDENT/STUDENT INTERACTION AND COMMUNICATION

Discussion

The use of public posting areas, discussion forums, and/or electronic announcements for questions of general interest to the entire class reduces the need for individual e-mail responses to commonly asked questions. Students come to rely on accessing announcements posted in a general format if used consistently. Students have different communication and interaction preferences and generally these preferences reflect student's abilities across these media. Use the right communication tool for the right task. For example, if the question requires a simple announcement, use e-mail or a posting on the Announcements page. If the question requires discussion between the students and faculty member, use a public discussion board.

Timely responses are very important to the electronic environment and course climate. Students will interpret rapid response as meaningful interaction between the professor and students.

Incorporate varied electronic communications real time chat and discussion and asynchronous opportunities such as e-mail or bulletin boards.

Incorporate opportunities for same-time, same place interactions such as office hours, occasional group meetings, etc.

Using a variety of methods of communication:

- Helps to build community or group awareness in the course
- Maximizes communication to group (i.e., students feel as though the faculty member is connecting with the course more frequently)
- Channels individual e-mails into group communication when appropriate
- Models appropriate use of communications tools

Establishing effective use of electronic methods of communication reduces the workload generated by individual questions of a similar nature. Timely responses generate positive classroom climate. Establishing effective communications models requires appropriate use of tools and eliminates redundant communications between participants.

BP 4-4: DESIGN BALANCED INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES

Discussion

Issues of balance between the learning activities designed into the course and the amount of time and energy required to monitor and maintain them is central to a successful DE course.

Some suggestions include:

- Self-graded assignments for the review of concepts
- Peer evaluation as a way to share assessment workload
- Self-evaluation
- Self-paced tutorials
- Case studies
- Learning contracts
- Small group work
- Collaborative learning

The faculty member might want to consider how well each activity/assignment:

- supports a variety of learning experiences
- facilitates student's meta-cognitive learning skills
- accommodates different learning styles
- keeps things interesting by varying roles of student and instructor
- provides parameters for the breadth and depth of the course equal to but not exceeding the face-to-face model

“Effective course design can begin with asking and answering the key question: what are the major learning goals and objectives for this course? Once these goals and objectives have been identified and clearly articulated, the question of which learning strategies, activities, and experiences to employ can be addressed.”

“Much of the power of learning via the Internet lies in its capacity to support multiple modes of communication including any combination of student-student, student-faculty, faculty-student, faculty-faculty, student-others, others-students, etc. Taking into account the varied learning styles of learners and providing opportunities for self-directed and collaborative learning, educators can facilitate powerful, effective courses geared to achieve specific learning goals and outcomes using the vast resources and capacities of online learning.”

Source: <http://illinois.online.uillinois.edu/IONresources/instructionalDesign/instructionalStrategies.asp>

BP 4-5: DEVELOP COURSE RUBRICS

Discussion

Building in rubrics (formatted explanation or instruction) provides students with the criteria they need to meet, which reduces the number of questions the instructor receives and reduces grading time by using consistent criteria across assignments. Rubrics also provide an order of importance for evaluation criteria and allow for more precise evaluation of student work. It is important that the guidelines for minimal standards be the same as for face-to-face courses.

Rubrics help students to work more effectively in self-paced environments. They also allow for consistent assessment within and across sections of the course and an opportunity for ease of feedback.

Creating rubrics requires time during the authoring process but saves faculty time during implementation, especially in the long term. This strategy has additional learning quality benefits, such as consistent feedback across students, clear expectations provided to students before assignments are due, and higher quality student output because students fully understand the assignment criteria beforehand.

Rubrics can be created during course development and/or they can be added during the teaching stage. Feedback rubrics are used to respond to common issues or questions.

Feedback rubrics can:

- Save time, since they can be reused and shared between faculty
- Support consistency across groups of students
- Streamline various tasks (administration, facilitation, assessment, evaluation)
- Be especially useful for larger groups of students
- Be used in the compilation of a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) archive

BP 4-6: PROVIDE DETAILED AND REPEATED INSTRUCTIONS FOR ASSIGNMENTS

Discussion

Faculty provided instructions to students should be specific, direct and repeated in various places on the learning management system boards to ensure that students can find the information needed to complete their assignments. **Redundancy is to be valued in DE.**

Repeated instructions:

- Reduces the number of phone calls and e-mails
- Enables student to self-monitor and self-instruct
- Establishes parameters for student success

Quality instructions and reference materials are a tremendous resource for students who do not have ready access to faculty (weekends or late at night). Well-designed and articulated instructions reduce student anxiety and confusion.

BP 4-7: ESTABLISH A ROUTINE TO ASSIST IN TIME MANAGEMENT

Discussion

Establishing a routine for students and faculty with regular and planned interaction within the online course and with students helps both faculty and students to remain in control of their workloads.

Shorter but more frequent course interactions prevent an overwhelming backlog of activity. Using the full capabilities of the learning management system can assist in many of the tasks required to operate a successful online course.

Benefits include:

- Ability to make your own schedule and streamline personal effectiveness
- Easier to manage workload
- Reduces extended time sitting at the computer
- Eliminates overwhelming backlog of activity
- Builds student confidence by helping them to know what to expect

BP 4-8: FOSTER GROUP DYNAMICS

Discussion

Fostering group dynamics, where educationally appropriate, encourages students to interact and learn from each other. If designed correctly, student interaction may change the nature of faculty intervention and participation. It also promotes the development of group problem solving skills, group awareness, appreciation of diversity, and a sense of a learning community.

Aspects of this strategy may include:

- Establishing a method of peer review on projects, etc.
- Involving students at the start of the course in peer review activities
- Establishing ground rules for peer review in order to support an atmosphere of trust
- Having a large-group activity prior to small-group activities

Benefits include:

- Promotes the type of environment where students learn from each other (as well as from the instructor)
- Promotes high quality work
- Builds a sense of community
- Increases student completion of assignments and the course
- Prepares students for teamwork out in the workforce

Fostering group dynamics takes time and energy on the part of faculty. Rubrics created to orient students to the group environment may be reused during subsequent course offerings. However, peer feedback and interaction cannot replace regular individualized feedback and expert guidance from the instructor.

5. *Student Support*

“If we truly embrace distance education as a means of promoting student learning, we also must be committed to providing the necessary distance support services for student success. Students will expect administrative and support services to be provided via the same delivery modes as are the courses they are taking.”

From: Creating a Learning College for the 21st Century: The Role of Technology and Distance Education in the Learning College by Diane G. Michael

BP 5-1: CLARIFY AND ENHANCE STUDENTS’ TECHNICAL SKILLS PRIOR TO REGISTRATION

Discussion

The creation of an online orientation tutorial facilitates student technological capabilities. The online tutorial might cover technical skills, support services, document and file management, netiquette, time management, study skills, resources, and policies concerning academic integrity and intellectual property. By directing students to the orientation tutorial, technological skills are built or refined before the course begins, reducing faculty time spent teaching non-content specific material. Matching the mode of delivery with the technical capabilities of the targeted audience eliminates student dissatisfaction and frustration with their experience and reduces faculty workload by limiting the number of support calls.

For example, student orientation to DE should:

- Include information directing students to the orientation tutorial in a letter welcoming students to a course.
- Initiate technological orientation prior to the start of course and properly integrate and reinforce it in course material.
- Make available on-line training for students (online tutorials, workshops, etc.)
- Provide materials (packet) to ensure that students are prepared
- Enable students to self-test technical skills
- Require an online test of student computer skills prior to being able to register for a course

Development of this kind of orientation and skill training:

- Allows faculty to focus on teaching content
- Allows students to be more efficient in the completion of assignments
- Enables students to self-test technical skills, increasing their confidence
- Students are better prepared for the technical requirements of the course
- Resolves technical issues a student may have prior to beginning a course

BP 5-2: FACILITATE GOAL SETTING

Discussion

Faculty must emphasize the importance for students to set realistic, incremental, ongoing and tangible goals for studying, reading, and completing assignments. For example, students submit a study plan to meet the course requirements, which also indicates their outside obligations during the course, to the professor for suggestions and recommendations. Recommendations could include questions concerning the meeting of course objectives and breaking down assignments into smaller components, etc.

BP 5-3: CREATE COURSE MATERIALS IN A PRINTER FRIENDLY FORMAT

Discussion

Students often print much of the DE content (i.e., web pages) for study purposes. Faculty should format content (study guides, outlines, and notes) in a printer friendly format (e.g., remove unnecessary pictures, limit color usage, and convert word processing documents to .rtf files).

BP 5-4: PROVIDE ONLINE ASSESSMENT AND SKILLS PRACTICE

Discussion

The provision of online mock exams, illustrative exam questions, and skill based exercises are useful to students as they seek to master course content and best understand how they will be held accountable to course requirements. Research has found that students will frequently and repeatedly self-test and self-assess when given the opportunities.

6. Faculty Support

“Faculty need rewards for their instructional development efforts through release time, monetary awards, software and hardware support, and credit in the salary, promotion and tenure process. Faculty members don’t need motivation; they need support. Faculty members have many interests and obligations competing for their time. The incentives structures indicating what our universities value still tilt heavily toward traditional research. Our best advice is to change these traditional incentive structures.”

Source: What do faculty want?, by Chizmar and Williams, Educause Quarterly, Number 1 2001

BP 6-1: TRAINING PROVIDED TO FACULTY SHOULD UTILIZE A VARIETY OF INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACHES

Discussion

There are a variety of complimentary methods for faculty training including:

- Training workshops designed with faculty input and provided on an individualized basis if needed
- Faculty mentoring
- Teaching teams for faculty teaching DE and those who want to be

Benefits of utilizing various training methods include:

- Faculty differing schedules and levels of ability can be addressed.
- Faculty can consult with their peers
- Faculty can utilize examples to develop new courses

Faculty who want training and receive it through an effective approach will be more successful in their DE offerings than those who do not perceive the training as being useful to their skill development.

BP 6-2: CREATE AND DISTRIBUTE REUSABLE TEMPLATES

Discussion

“Universities should create and provide a selection of web-based modules driven by and tied to a specific pedagogical strategy. More specifically, they should create modules or templates that provide presenting, interacting, guiding, and exploring strategies so that faculty members have a diverse array of options to fit both student and instructor needs.”

Source: What do faculty want?, by Chizmar and Williams, Educause Quarterly, Number 1 2001

Using templates takes time at the development stage but substantially reduces workload during delivery, helps streamline complex processes, and helps faculty with non-teaching tasks. In particular, this strategy assists novice online educators by providing frameworks for the development process.

These templates can cover the following:

- Instructor guidelines, course development style sheets, development schedules
- Evaluation/assessment questionnaires
- Tracking methods for course details (frequently asked questions, etc.)
- Study guides, student guides, supplemental readings booklets, etc.
- Portfolio guidelines, lesson structure

Benefits may include:

- Standardizes course development and course delivery tools
- Allows information sharing
- Supports updating
- Allows pooling of expertise
- Helps novice instructors
- Provides information clearly to students
- Enables system solutions to be created

BP 6-3: PROVIDE FACULTY WITH A SAMPLE ONLINE COURSE

Discussion

Providing the faculty with access to a successfully designed and developed course facilitates the development of a new course. Web-based “mirror sites” can be effective as well as print-based samples (hands-on experience and practice with virtual classrooms, chats, discussion boards, etc.).

Suggestions for selecting the sample course may be:

- Similar course learning outcomes; similar course content is a secondary consideration
- Similar length and design model of courses
- Similar structure and target audience of courses

Benefits of this practice include:

- Encourages faculty to follow successful design model
 - Enhances faculty confidence and feelings of effectiveness
 - Helps faculty avoid “reinventing the wheel”
 - Encourages effective use of faculty time and energy
-

7. Evaluation and Assessment

All institutions offering distance education coursework should engage in program evaluation. Areas for evaluation should include: the characteristics of successful and unsuccessful DE students; variations among academic disciplines; faculty-student interaction; and the efficacy of offering large parts or all of an academic program by distance learning.

While evaluation of specific faculty member’s performance is proscribed by the CBA, there are many opportunities for faculty members to conduct evaluation and assessment that they, and only they, can use to improve their course(s). Similarly, departments can assess programs in a variety of ways. In *Guiding Principles for Faculty in Distance Education*, a report from the Working Group of the Indiana Partnership for Statewide Education, both program and course evaluation methods are discussed. It is suggested that course evaluation be seen as a periodic review to ensure quality, consistency with the curriculum, currency and advancement of student outcomes.

Components might include:

- Procedures for ongoing review and updating of content
- Methods of assuring that DE courses meet the same objectives and include the same substantive content as campus based courses
- Student evaluations

The following suggestions are from principles created as part of the product of a Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications project, [Balancing Quality and Access](#): Reducing State Policy Barriers to Electronically Delivered Higher Education Programs. The three-year project was supported by the U.S.

Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education.

<http://www.wcet.info/projects/balancing/principles.asp>

- Institutional evaluation should encompass the program's educational effectiveness, including assessments of student learning outcomes, student retention, and student and faculty satisfaction. Students should have access to such program evaluation data.
- The institution should provide for assessment and documentation of student achievement in each course and at completion of the program.

BP 7-1: DEPARTMENTAL GUIDELINES SHOULD BE USED TO CLARIFY THE APPROPRIATENESS OF COURSES FOR DE

Discussion

Each department/program will have its own unique perspective on the appropriate utilization of DE as a method of delivery of course content. Having a standard way of reviewing faculty proposals to offer courses/programs through DE will provide for a fair and consistent process.

When a course is presented for departmental approval the following questions should be answered by the presenting faculty member or members so as to allow the department to make a reasonable judgment on the appropriateness of the course for online development.

Departments may have other questions unique to their programs and courses that they wish to add.

These questions may include:

- Does the faculty member have or how will s/he acquire the technical expertise (i.e., Blackboard and computer skills) to deliver the course?
- Will the faculty member have access to hardware/software to deliver the course successfully?
- How does the course or program change fit into the overall departmental program needs?
- If summer course, will teaching the course two times in the next 3 years impact departmental programming?
- Is demand for the course demonstrated? How?
- Who is the target audience?
- How will assessment/testing be done to address concerns of academic integrity?
- How will student feedback be handled regarding assignments?
- What methods will be used to facilitate student to student interaction, if appropriate?
- What is the nature and mode of methods the faculty will use to ensure accessibility by students to the faculty member regarding questions on course content, discipline related questions, personal issues, evaluation and assessment, or advising issues?
- What face to face interactions are planned?
- What is the timing and pacing of instruction to course content?
- How is course content transferred to the online environment?

BP 7-2: DEPARTMENTS SHOULD MEET PERIODICALLY TO REVIEW DE PROGRAM EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT RESULTS AND CONSIDER NEEDED MODIFICATIONS

Discussion

The rapid change in DE technologies requires that review of its uses be built into program development. What may have been appropriate at one time may become passé or be in need of revision. This function should be conducted at the departmental level with attention to curriculum and content delivery issues. See worksheet in Appendices A.

BP 7-3: USING A VARIETY OF ASSESSMENT TYPES MAY ASSIST IN AUTHENTICATING STUDENT OUTCOMES

Discussion

Student assessment utilizes observation, measurement and analysis of student achievement of demonstrable learning outcomes as stated in course goals and objectives.

Best practices in student outcome assessment might include:

- Measurement prior to learning,
- Intended outcomes and value added, and provides for documentation of what learners know, and what they can do as a result of the learning experience. <http://www.wcet.info/projects/balancing/principles.asp>

“The usefulness of many of the assessment approaches available for the conventional classroom is limited for distance education because of the lack of control of assessment conditions, the unique set of available resources, and the inherent isolation of the distance learner. Computerized adaptive testing and group authentic performance assessment can be considered impractical for distance education. Conventional objective testing and computer assisted testing may be used for low-stakes formative and diagnostic evaluations for low- order cognitive skills. Essay exams and individual authentic performance assessment may be used for low-stakes formative and diagnostic evaluations of high-order cognitive skills. For high- stakes summative and/or placement evaluation, portfolio assessment appears to be the only justifiable approach. This is not because portfolio assessment outcomes are highly reliable. Rather, given the available alternatives for distance education, portfolio assessment outcomes hold the promise of providing the most reliable information.”

Source: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN DISTANCE EDUCATION EVALUATION
Hoi K. Suen and Jay Parkes, Department of Educational and School Psychology, The Pennsylvania State University
<http://www.music.ecu.edu/DistEd/EVALUATION.html>

Existing Data on Distance Education at Shippensburg University

Programs:

Three master degree programs: MBA, MSIS, and Masters of Gerontology

Undergraduate and graduate summer courses

A recommendation to expand DE into a winter term is currently on hold.

Enrollment information:

Technologically mediated instruction offered at a distance has become a key component of summer school programming. Since their inception in 2001 at Shippensburg University as part of the “virtual university”, DE offerings for summer courses and enrollments have more than doubled every year. The number of courses has risen from 3 with 25 students enrolled in 2001 to 55 courses in summer 2004 with 915 students enrolled. While the number of students enrolling in summer classes has increased from 2003 to 2004, the increase at the undergraduate level may be accounted for mainly by the online DE offerings. Essentially, the number of students enrolling in online summer course has more than doubled each year since 2002. Each of these years saw an increase in the number of in-seat summer course cancellations (see Table). No online DE courses were cancelled in this same time period. TABLE (Policy1:6)

Year	<i>Undergraduate</i>				<i>Graduate</i>			
	In-seat summer		Distance		In-seat summer		Distance	
	<i>Courses</i>	<i>Enrlmt</i>	<i>Courses</i>	<i>Enrlmt</i>	<i>Courses</i>	<i>Enrlmt</i>	<i>Courses</i>	<i>Enrlmt</i>
2003	105	1856	23	444	77	1075	0	0
2004	96	1733	50	890	75	1096	2	25

* data does not include the MSIS or the MBA programs

In-seat summer courses

	2003		2004	
Courses scheduled	68		74	
Courses cancelled	13	19%	26	35%

Student Demographics:

DE was originally viewed as an opportunity to reach new audiences, “to promote an extension of SU’s academic program to a wider and more diverse constituency than on-campus traditional students”(SU – Continuing Education Policy). With 4 years of experience and data, SHIP has discovered that the audience for the online offerings at the undergraduate level is our own students. Most of these students are taking the courses from a distance but many are taking both on-line and traditional summer courses at the same time at the university. (See tables.)

Distance	2004	Term 3	2004	Term 4	2004	Term 5
Within:	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 mile	38	10.3	25	7.3	14	6.5
10 miles	47	12.7	29	8.4	16	7.5
25 miles	142	38.5	106	30.8	50	23.4
50 miles	216	58.5	178	51.7	91	42.5
100 miles	302	81.8	250	72.7	154	72.0
>100 m.	67	18.2	94	27.3	60	28.0
	369		344		214	
*						

**If you count the total numbers from this chart they add to 927 whereas the data from the spreadsheet given to us earlier shows 890 students enrolled in DE courses*

Students at all levels of their undergraduate program and from all disciplines are taking online DE courses (See Table). Of the 646 unduplicated summer enrollees, 87.3% were enrolled at SU in Spring 2004 and 82.7% were enrolled in the Fall of 2003. Approximately 1% were non-degree students (55 of whom were never enrolled at SU in a degree program).

Freshman	Sophomores	Juniors	Seniors
12-13%	27-33%	30-39%	6-19%

*Summer 2004

*Freshman are not new freshmen (credit level freshmen)

DE Course Offerings by College and Department:

The current continuing education and/or DE policy for course development and offering is: “Any individual faculty member with approval of his or her department chair and college dean may request that a particular course be offered in the continuing education program”. Given this practice, there has been no programmatic approach to either what courses are offered or their potential impact on other summer school offerings and on regularly scheduled semester courses.

Of the undergraduate courses offered, there is equal representation at all levels and in all schools.

Year	100	200	300	400	500
2002	5	2	3	3	1
2003	7	5	6	4	0
2004	14	13	17	9	2

* 2001 courses were all week long Art.48 courses

Schools	Term III	Term IV	Term V
Arts/Sciences	9	9	6
Educ/Human Services	5	4	2
Business	7	6	4

*** Summer 2004**

There has been a significant increase in DE online offerings and a broader representation of departments offering online DE courses. Experienced faculty have continued offering DE courses, often developing more than one course. Novice faculty are being attracted to teaching DE summer courses as well. Of 39 courses taught in summer 2004, 19 faculty members were teaching for at least the second time and 20 were teaching for the first time. 18 faculty members have developed and taught more than one course via DE. Clearly, DE is catching on for both faculty and students. Still, many departments offer no online DE courses.

On-line courses offered by department:

<i>Dept</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2004</i>
<i>Acct</i>	0	0	1
<i>Art</i>	0	0	2
<i>Com</i>	2	4	7
<i>CRJ</i>	2	2	5
<i>Ecn</i>	1	1	1
<i>Eng</i>	1	2	3
<i>Eth</i>	1	0	1
<i>Fin</i>	0	0	1
<i>Geo</i>	0	2	1
<i>Isn</i>	0	0	2
<i>Ins</i>	0	0	1
<i>Mat</i>	0	1	2
<i>Mkt</i>	1	2	6
<i>Mgt</i>	1	2	5
<i>Mus</i>	0	0	1
<i>Phy</i>	2	2	2
<i>Psy</i>	2	2	2
<i>Rdg</i>	0	0	1
<i>Soc</i>	0	0	1
<i>Spe</i>	0	1	1
<i>Swk</i>	1	1	1
<i>Tch</i>	0	0	5

**data does not include MSIS and MSA courses taught online*

Grades given for DE courses compared to grades given for in-seat courses

Data comparing grades of face-to-face courses and DE online summer courses shows that while more As are given in on-line courses, the overall grading does not differ from face-to-face courses. Those courses where many As are given may be better characterized as being typical of a particular faculty member’s approach toward grading rather than being a reflection of the delivery system.

	Not On-Line %	On-Line %
All As	36.6	44.9
All Bs	35.5	32.9
All Cs	17.2	15.0
All Ds and Fs	6.4	4.0
	14750	574

*Summer 2004

Lockee, Moore, and Burton (2002) argue that comparing grades from traditional to DE is a “serious but common error”. Rather, the appropriate assessment question is whether the students have learned what the course is designed to teach, thus a comparison of intended learning outcomes between traditional and DE courses should be made.

Recommendations for program evaluation and assessment appear in the Policies and Best Practices sections of this report.

A recommendation from Middle States to engage in continuous program evaluation addressing issues such as:

A. Is the success of DE measured in multiple ways?

B. Is the evaluation process used to improve the program?

C. Is there an assessment of the costs and profits?

D. Is there data on successful and innovative uses of technology?

E. Are learning objectives reviewed?

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Appendix

a. Department Course Revision Worksheet

Condition	Status
Does the faculty member have or how will s/he acquire the technical expertise (i.e., Blackboard and computer skills) to deliver the course?	
Will the faculty member have access to hardware/software to deliver the course successfully?	
How does the course or program change fit into the overall departmental program needs?	
If summer course, will teaching the course two times in the next 3 years impact departmental programming?	
Is demand for the course demonstrated? How?	
Who is the target audience?	
How will assessment/testing be done to address concerns of academic integrity?	
How will student feedback be handled regarding assignments?	
What methods will be used to facilitate student to student interaction, if appropriate?	
What is the nature and mode of methods the faculty will use to ensure accessibility by students to the faculty member regarding questions on course content, discipline related questions, personal issues, evaluation and assessment, or advising issues?	
What face to face interactions are planned?	
What is the timing and pacing of instruction to course content?	
How is course content transferred to the online environment?	

DE Approval & Training Processes

