

Report of the Online Education Task Force December 2012

In the summer of 2012, Interim Provost Nancy Brickhouse formed an Online Education Task Force. The group was charged with addressing two questions:

1. To identify, understand and develop solutions to barriers to online learning programs;
2. To develop guidance regarding the engagement of third party vendors to facilitate online education delivery.

Interim Provost Brickhouse requested the final report be submitted no later than the end of the 2012 Fall Semester. What follows are the Task Force's key findings and recommendations.

Online education is one of the single most disruptive forces affecting higher education in the 21st century. Since its launch in 1988 distance education at the University of Delaware has expanded and then retrenched in a fuzzy policy making framework. It was affirmed in the Faculty Handbook by a 1993 statement.¹ Later, the scope of online education was significantly reduced by a 2008 ad hoc task force report.² Compensation for faculty teaching online has been codified rigidly in the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA)³ from the outset.

Live course instruction is the standard instructional delivery method for students able to access the University of Delaware campuses. Online instructional methods provide a means to enhance learning for resident students and to ensure life long learning. Furthermore, such methods are advantageous in expanding the reach of the University to those students who can't access the campus.

There is significant discussion and confusion about the operational definition of online and hybrid instructional delivery. The University should adopt the well established and national standard definition developed by the Sloan Consortium.

Online: 80% or greater of the content is delivered online
Blended/hybrid: 30 to 79% of the content is delivered online
Web Facilitated: 1 to 29% of the content is delivered online
Traditional: 0% of the content is delivered online

A vision for the role of distance education within the broader academic mission of the University of Delaware is needed. Further, a more sophisticated policy making framework for online learning within a faculty governed, decentralized, high research activity university is fundamental. The Online Education Task Force identified and considered five questions to be addressed to achieve those goals.

¹ University of Delaware Faculty Handbook, Section 3 "Use of Distance Learning Course Formats"

² UD Online Task Force Recommendations, September 2008. See Appendix.

³ University of Delaware [Collective Bargaining Agreement](#).

1. Is a focus on graduate/professional online education more consistent with the goals of a UD education than undergraduate degree offerings?

Online instruction offers the potential to augment undergraduate and graduate education for residential students and to provide a University of Delaware education to students unable to attend our campuses. Students should have access to online courses, without restriction based on academic standing, i.e. pre-college through graduate students.

The University has a long history of fully online graduate degree programs. These should continue, with new programs developed that align with the mission and priorities of UD. Careful consideration should be given to the market and areas where UD has competitive advantage and/or signature programs. The following is but one example worthy of further consideration. Online courses offered during special sessions could attract UD students to UD courses that they would otherwise not take because of distance between their home and campus. In this approach, access to UD classes would ensure academic quality and generate new revenue.

2. What elements of the policy making process should be developed at the institutional level and what are College specific? These include

- whether an online course is taught on-load or over-load.
- what are incentives or disincentives for teaching online?
- is there an optimum enrollment size for an online course?

Policies and decisions that impact faculty workload, incentives and optimal educational delivery are best administered at the unit/department and college levels. Chairs administer faculty workload because they are well informed to make these determinations and to provide incentives/disincentives and guidance to faculty members. Optimal enrollment depends on a number of factors that are often discipline specific. To ensure academic quality, positive student learning outcomes and financial viability, colleges should set minimum/maximum enrollment levels. Colleges should also consider equity and consistency in determining enrollment limits and these should not be more restrictive than the limits for face-to-face instruction.

- who owns a faculty member's intellectual property?
- what are the remuneration rates for teaching online as over-load?

University Policy (Research 6-7) delineates ownership of scholarly works produced by faculty members are part of their creative endeavors, including instruction. The remuneration rates for teaching online courses as overload have historically been imbedded in the AAUP CBA. This approach provided a financial incentive to teach online courses off-load, and distinguished online teaching from face-to-face teaching. To place these two, as well as other teaching delivery approaches, on equal footing, the online remuneration rates for teaching online courses should be discontinued. Overload teaching, regardless of delivery should continue to receive compensation via s-contracts as outlined in the CBA.

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3. What office(s) should provide centralized support for compliance with the state authorization process for distance education?

State authorization compliance should be administered at the institutional level through Professional and Continuing Studies and the Office of Institutional Research with guidance from the Office of General Counsel.

4. What is the process to identify and select third party vendors to support online education initiatives?

UD's Professional and Continuing Studies, through UD Online, offers support for the marketing, technology development, student recruitment and retention of distance education programs. It has long supported both online courses and fully online programs developed by UD faculty. Some programs may find it may be advantageous to engage external vendors to support online programs. The recent agreement between Lerner College and Academic Partnerships to launch an online MBA degree program represents one such example. The role of faculty shall remain primary and must include their responsibilities for course content, instruction, and assessment of student learning. The role of external vendors should be limited to recruitment and marketing, retention, instructional design and technology support and similar activities. Solicitation of vendors should follow a rigorous RFP process.

Other guiding principles for engaging vendors:

- (i) limit the agreement to terms as short in duration as possible, ideally not to exceed three years;
- (ii) do not enter into any agreement that includes exclusivity terms that would impede the opportunity for other programs in the same college or other colleges to engage other vendors;
- (iii) do not accept terms that seek to minimize the UD brand when marketing the program;
- (iv) all agreements must be reviewed by the Offices of the Provost and the General Counsel. The Provost has final decision-making authority.

As online education continues to grow, the University should determine whether expanding its internal resources, i.e. UD Online and instructional IT expertise, to facilitate a greater online presence without the need to engage external vendors is warranted. Such an evaluation should consider whether the investment of additional resources is in alignment with the University's mission, ensures academic quality and student learning outcome goals and is fiscally responsible.

5. Does the RBB algorithm accurately account for the costs incurred by a College to serve learners at a distance? Should costs be prorated for students not using administrative support services such as facilities and public safety?

A thoughtful and complete analysis of the actual costs associated with delivering online programs should be conducted to ensure that the expenses of students who don't physically access campus are accurately captured. Consideration should be given to allocating the revenue generated by these students only to those units that are providing services and support. Online program students should be included in

algorithm 9 (Academic Support Expense). It is recommended that they not be counted in algorithms 10 (Non-academic Support Expense) and 12 (Facilities, Utilities & Capital Maintenance). However, the Task Force did consider that online students could be expected to contribute to capital maintenance via algorithm 12. This topic should be considered further.

Lastly, the Online Education Task Force strongly advocates that the Faculty Senate revises and updates the current Faculty Handbook statement "Use of Distance Learning Course Formats." In doing so, the Senate should consider (i) current literature on distance education and student learning outcomes; (ii) the contemporary ways in which students access information and learn; (iii) online delivery as a method of equal merit to face-to-face education, i.e. avoid a policy in which online delivery is relegated to lower status; (iv) the benefits of a forward looking policy in advancing innovation in education and student learning at the University of Delaware.



done 5/2013

Committee Membership

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- Bruce Weber, Dean, Lerner College of Business & Economics
- Kathy Werrell, Assistant Dean, Engineering
- Lawrence White, Vice President and General Counsel

Appendix

UD Online Task Force Recommendations

Effective September 3, 2008

Class enrollment limits

- Student enrollment in a UD Online course should not exceed the maximum enrollment of the equivalent "live" course.
- For online courses that do not have an equivalent "live" course, student enrollment will require the approval of the department chair and the dean of the college, if enrollment exceeds 40 students.
- UD Online courses that are not part of the faculty workload will be limited to one course per semester per faculty, subject to the approval of the department chair.
- Enrollment will be automatically set at a maximum of forty (40) students per course. Enrollment can be higher with the approval of the faculty member, the department chair, and the dean of the college.

Registration restrictions

- Enrollment of freshmen and sophomores in online courses during the fall and spring semester is restricted.
- If a freshman or sophomore requests to enroll in an online course, it must be approved by the Assistant Dean in the student's "home" college.

Faculty payment

- UD Online and the Office of the Registrar ensure that faculty teaching online courses are paid in a timely manner.
- S-contracts are generated by UD Online on the fifth working day after the Census/Free Drop-Add date.
- On the day after the Withdraw without Academic Penalty Date, an additional pay form is generated to compensate faculty for students who have been added to courses after the original s-contracts were generated.

Course evaluation

- Departments need to ensure that there is a systematic process for the evaluation and assessment of online courses.
- UD Online staff, in coordination with the academic units, will review and re-certify online courses every third time that they are offered.

Addendum to UD Online Task Force Recommendations (2008)

Administrative Responsibility for Online Courses

The Division of Professional and Continuing Studies (PCS) is the administrative and coordinating arm of the University responsible for the administration of online courses, and implements academic policies and procedures as determined by the Colleges and Departments. An online course is defined as one in which 90% or more of the instructional activity is delivered online or through another distance mode.

The department chair in consultation with the involved faculty member determines whether or not a course meets the criterion for an online course. If the course is offered online PCS will provide the following services to support instruction:

- 1) Schedule the course, including classroom space if 10% of the course content is delivered face to face
- 2) Monitor enrollment restrictions
- 3) Process compensation for courses taught on an overload basis consistent with the guidelines in the current Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA)
- 4) Manage the exam process, including monitoring student identification authenticity consistent with federal and accreditation guidelines
- 5) Manage all student evaluations for online courses ensuring this information is available to the faculty member and department chair
- 6) Review and "recertify" an online course after every third time it is offered

Addendum Adopted by the Provost's Executive Council 10/20/10