

Faculty Senate

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Distance Education Committee

2010-2011 Annual Report

Membership

Bruce Dugger '11, Chair
 John Meyers '11
 Dawn Anzinger '12
 John Edwards '13
 Roger Nielsen '13
 Lisa Templeton '13

Fisheries & Wildlife
 Media Services
 Forest Ecosystems & Society
 Psychology
 Geosciences
 Extended Campus

Ex-Officios:

Budgets & Fiscal Planning Committee (TBA)
 Curriculum Council (TBA)
 Graduate Council (TBA)
 Library (Stefanie Buck)
 Extended Campus (TBA)

Student Members:

- Graduate (TBA)
- Undergraduate (TBA)

Executive Committee Liaison - John Selker

Committee Charges for 2010-2011

At a meeting with the Faculty Senate Executive Committee during summer 2010, the DEC Chair brought it to the attention of the FSEC that the need and purpose of the DEC was unclear (see 2009-2010 annual report). The standing rules no longer applied and it was clear that the FSEC had no clear role for the DEC. The conversation was productive (but we think unresolved) and resulted in the FSEC assigning the DEC a broad range of issues to prioritize and consider for the 2010-2011 academic year. The list of topics included:

1. Financial model for Ecampus - work with the University Budget Committee on recommendations as to the funding model
2. Goals for Ecampus from an academic perspective; what is the mission of Ecampus from an academic/educational perspective
3. Impact of distance education on P&T - how do distance education activities "count" - are policy statements needed?
4. Policy regarding on-campus students access to Ecampus courses both undergraduate and graduate
 - one complaint we have heard from on-campus students is that required courses in their major are only available through Ecampus and so they have to pay extra tuition in order to take a required course. I have not verified to determine if this is actually true, but, if so, the DEC may want to explore a policy about this.
 - Graduate students on assistantship (who therefore need to be enrolled in 12 credits each term) cannot use Ecampus credits to count toward the 12 credits. This has been explained to me as a budget issue. DEC may want to explore alternative strategies or options for graduate assistants
5. Overload compensation policy - this new policy prohibits Ecampus faculty from getting paid based on the number of students/SCH generation because some faculty were abusing the system. I do not know how much faculty input there was to this policy. Maybe it did come to DEC prior to implementation, but if not, it should have been one that had come to the DEC for discussion prior to implementation.
6. Faculty Development for distance education - recommendation to inform Ecampus as to the most

- effective faculty development opportunities
- 7. Tuition levels of Ecampus compared to competitors - a recommendation from DEC to Ecampus
- 8. Intellectual property policy surrounding distance education
- 9. Course/program quality and assessment of distance courses and programs - what oversight is needed beyond the Curriculum Council review of new courses? What oversight is needed in terms of assessment strategies. Gita Ramaswamy, Director of Assessment, would be a good person to consult with regarding this issue.

We included on our agenda the recurring item of revision of standing rules and an additional item of considering changing the name of the committee. During spring term, the DEC was also asked by the FSEC for a report updating how OSU and Ecampus were progressing with meeting the requirements of the newly passed "State Authorization Rule". Below is a summary of our progress on these items. ***Recommendations and action items are bold, italicized and highlighted in yellow.***

2010 - 2011 Activities and Accomplishments The DEC met four times this year. I believe my committee members were prepared to meet more frequently; however, my schedule this year limited our productivity. At the first meeting, we spent some time debating and prioritizing the issues listed above to shape our agenda for the remainder of the academic year. The committee felt that items 1, 2, 6, 7, 8 were low priority or being dealt with by other committees. For example, several issues were being deliberated on by the Ecampus task force, created by the President of the Faculty Senate and the Provost. Three members of the DEC (B. Dugger, R. Nielsen, L. Templeton) served on the task force and we agree with the action items and guidelines produced in the Ecampus Task Force Report. We recommend the FSEC review that report.

1. Agenda item: Should the name of the Distance Education Committee be changed?
There was general agreement that the phrase "Distance Education" is outdated and fails to capture the evolving nature of online education at OSU. For example, 25-30% of our student credit hours at Ecampus are generated by on-campus students. Thus, the committee agreed that changing the name of the committee would be useful. ***After consideration of several alternatives, the committee recommended its name be changed to the Online Education Committee.***
2. Revise the Standing Rules of the Committee
In our 2009-2010 report we summarized our deliberations on the current list of standing rules. It was our committee's recommendation that rules 1-4 be deleted and that rules 5 and 6 be modified. In retrospect, given the nature of the DEC Chair's conversation with the FSEC during the summer of 2010, one standing rule seems sufficient. We spent relatively little time deliberating this issue, but have the following recommended standing rule:

The OEC considers and provides recommendations to the Faculty Senate on a wide range of philosophical and technical issues considered important to faculty and students related to the role of online education in meeting the academic mission of Oregon State University.

The rapidly changing role of Ecampus and other online learning opportunities at OSU would seem to require that the standing rules be flexible, so we see little value in being more prescriptive.

3. State Authorization for Ecampus Programs
As part of the US Higher Education Act, there is a new requirement called the Program Integrity Rule (PIR). It appears targeted at irregularities associated with how "for profit" colleges are taking advantage of the student federal aid system to make profit, to the detriment of students. As is often the case, it appears to have a variety of unintended consequences for public universities like OSU. Alfonso Bradoch and Lisa Templeton of Ecampus provided an update on what's being done to bring OSU Ecampus in compliance with this new rule.

The rule states:

"If an institution is offering postsecondary education through distance or correspondence education to students in a State in which it is not physically located, the institution must meet any State requirements for it to be legally offering postsecondary distance or correspondence education in that State. We are further providing that an institution must be able to document upon request by the Department that it has the applicable State approval."

Twenty states currently have a similar requirement, but it is typically only applicable to universities that have a "physical presence" in the state. As you can imagine, the definition of physical presence varies and can be as limited as having exam proctors or internships. This new federal regulation has forced

most other states that lack a current policy on regulating DE programs in general to consider adopting one.

Ecampus is taking the lead in assuring that OSU complies with the new rule. Unfortunately, complying appears rather onerous. Each program offered by OSU (not just the university as a whole) must be approved in each state each year. Ecampus has contacted each state to determine what it will take to come into compliance. The cost associated with meeting state regulations varies by state. OSU Ecampus is paying the costs associated with distance education approval and they estimate it will take \$150,000 to \$300,000 to get approval from all 50 states. Additionally, there will be recurring costs to maintain standing in each state each year. Because of the general problems that universities around the country are having meeting these requirements, the federal government extended the deadline from July 2011 to July 2014. Oregon's congressional delegation and the OUS Chancellor's office are aware of the problem with the PIR, and there is some hope that a political solution might be brokered.

We are fortunate that the considerable revenue generated by Ecampus has provided the funding needed to address the new regulation. Ecampus thinks that, if nothing changes, the cost of complying with this rule may stifle development of new online programs at other universities that lack such funding.

Lastly, the new rule also has implications for on-campus programs that offer internships that are based in other states. There is a separate effort, headed by Becky Warner, to address this issue.

If you are interested in reading additional materials on this new rule, the following web sites are useful:

<http://wcet.wiche.edu/advance/state-approval>

4. Undergraduate and Graduate Access to Ecampus Courses

We spent the remainder of our time this year dealing with this agenda item. As online education gains a more prominent role in meeting OSU's educational mission, a couple issues associated with equity and fairness to students have come up that need to be addressed.

1. Should undergraduates who are based on-campus be required to take Ecampus courses as part of the requirements for earning their degree?

This is an issue because the costs of Ecampus and on-campus courses can vary. This question was also being considered by the Ecampus Task Force. For the sake of efficiency, the ETF took the lead in crafting a policy recommendation (recall that several DEC members serve on the Task Force). The Ecampus Task Force outlined a guiding principle related to the delivery of instruction for oncampus students. It reads:

"In considering the issues for on-campus students taking Ecampus courses or hybrid courses, we started with confirmation of a guiding principle for delivery of instruction for on-campus courses: Regardless of the mechanism of delivery of instruction, students paying Corvallis on-campus tuition and fees should have the ability to fulfill degree requirements without being expected to enroll in an Ecampus course. While there may be pedagogical reasons for delivering instruction to on-campus students via hybrid or on-line approaches, the costs of these experiences should be included in the on-campus tuition and fees. Corvallis campus students should have access to all needed courses at the Corvallis campus pricing structure. Students, of course, may choose to complete degree requirements by taking Ecampus courses and opt to pay extra for an Ecampus course."

This reccomendation specifically excludes required field programs, most of which carry additional fees related to transportation, food and housing, and for which there is a longstanding pedagoical rationale.

The DEC agrees with this guiding principle and we recommend the Faculty Senate adopt a resolution supporting this philosophy.

2. Graduate students on a GTA or GRA cannot use Ecampus credits to count toward the 12 credits they must enroll in to maintain their academic standing.

Faculty from multiple colleges on campus have complained about this issue and requested that it "be fixed". Complaints have risen over the past few years as the availability of graduate courses offered

through Ecampus has increased. This issue was an agenda item for not only the DEC in 2010-2011 but in varied forms for the University Budget Committee and the Ecampus Task Force. Because of other priorities, the UBC did not address this issue this year. The Ecampus Task Force considered the issue in a broad sense when they considered issues associated with access, equity and fairness for students, but they deferred to the DEC to consider this issue in detail.

It is not clear when this policy was instituted. Regardless, based on conversations with the Graduate School and University Budget Office, it does appear to have originated with the Provost's Office (it was not a Graduate School policy decision), and it was budget driven. The policy was implemented because of the fundamental difference between on-campus and Ecampus regarding how tuition dollars are dispersed. Currently, all graduate tuition is paid into the university general fund, while tuition paid to Ecampus is largely returned directly to the academic units teaching the course.

The nature of the problem varies with the specific circumstance. Here are three examples.

1. Graduate students given tuition remissions as part of a GTA or GRA can not apply Ecampus courses towards meeting their 12 credit requirement.
2. Students willing to pay the Ecampus tuition cannot use Ecampus credits towards the graduate assistantship 12 credit hour (full time) requirement. This requires them to sign up for additional on campus credits in order to be considered "full time". This has resulted in students carrying 15-21 credits a term, at considerable cost in time, effort and money.

This problem has also revealed that:

3. A PI is not allowed to use tuition money in a grant to pay Ecampus tuition.

While there may be fiscal reasons for this policy, academically it makes no sense and the DEC recommends that the FSEC engage the Provost's Office in discussions to change this policy.

During discussions about how to resolve this problem with various entities on campus, the general statement that "...changing the policy will result in a loss of revenue to OSU's general fund..." invariably was uttered. While this seems true, the magnitude of this impact is unknown and the statement alone is not sufficient to preclude searching for solutions or changing the policy.

During our deliberations, we felt solutions could differ depending on the specific scenario. Additionally, lacking specific information about the magnitude of the financial impact changing this policy would have on OSU, some data seem needed to help guide a long-term solution.

We recommend a two step process for moving towards a resolution:

- 1. The policy statement should be revised immediately to allow graduate students to pay Ecampus tuition and have those credit hours count towards the 12 credit hours required to maintain their academic standing. Second, PIs should be allowed to pay Ecampus tuition from a grant.***

If a student is paying their tuition, they should have the right to select from the full range of course options at OSU. While keeping Ecampus separate from on-campus might have made sense when Ecampus was a very small enterprise with a very limited course catalog, that is no longer the case, and we feel this artificial barrier between Ecampus and on-campus needs to be reconsidered. Similarly, a PI that raises tuition dollars through grants should be able to support their graduate student in a way the PI and student feels best supports the student's academic development. ***Additionally, PIs should not be required to specifically identify "Ecampus tuition" as a line item in their grants.*** The need for students to take an Ecampus course will often not be planned in advance; rather, it will arise because of unforeseen consequences.

Changing the policy as recommended above will resolve part of the problem and provide an opportunity to collect data related to other parts of the problem. It was clear from conversations that resistance to adopting wholesale changes to the current policy in part stems from uncertainty about the market for Ecampus courses by on-campus graduate students. Once some data have been gathered from step one, they can be used along with financial models to perform a more detailed analysis of the fiscal consequences associated with allowing graduate students broader access to Ecampus. The underlying

principle behind this recommendation is that both cases represent "new monies" for OSU. It remains an administrative decision as to how they are to be distributed equitably. Towards that end,

2. We recommend that Faculty Senate request that OSU undertake a formal review of the fiscal consequences associated with allowing on-campus graduate students who receive tuition remissions to count Ecampus courses towards maintaining their academic standing.

Such a review would provide real fiscal data that could be used to discuss this issue more objectively with the faculty. We understand the issue of tuition remissions is more complicated because of the firewall between the OSU General Fund and Ecampus accounting. However, that logistical reality is inconsistent with an academic philosophy that values fairness and access to courses for all students at OSU. We recognize that nothing currently prevents all students from taking Ecampus courses, but the financial reality of requiring they pay more, in effect, serves that purpose. Finally,

We recommend that the FSEC resist any effort by the administration to require academic departments to pay Ecampus tuition for graduate students.

This "solution" has been discussed within the University Budget Committee, but we do not believe this is a feasible solution. The individual units already carry a large part of the burden of delivery of the courses. Such a mandate would stifle efforts to develop and deliver quality Ecampus programs and likely constrain access to Ecampus courses by graduate students.

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