

Appendix C: Five-Year Review

Distance Education Committee ([Proposed] Online Education Committee)

Faculty Senate Committee on Committees
March 17, 2012

Interviewed: Professor Roger Nielsen, Chair, Distance Education Committee, March 16, 2012

Interviewer: Associate Professor William E. Loges, Chair, Committee on Committees

This review of the Distance Education Committee is submitted in accordance with the duties of the OSU Faculty Senate Committee on Committees to review each Faculty Senate committee at five-year intervals using the following criteria established by the Faculty Senate:

1. Do the Standing Rules clearly reflect the function & composition of this committee?
2. Have the committee's actions/function, as reported in the annual reports and based on consultation with the current chair and committee, been consistent with their Standing Rules?
3. Do the annual reports provide a memory of the issues this committee addressed, their activities and any outcomes?
4. What has been the role/benefit of the student members?
5. What connection is there to the University's strategic plan?
6. To what extent does the committee add value to the university and/or faculty governance?
7. If the chair believes the committee does not add value, please explain and address the question as to whether the committee should continue to exist.
8. Does this committee's work enhance OSU's commitment to diversity? If so, how?

Professor Nielsen and I met in his office. As our interview began, Prof. Nielsen noted that since last year the Distance Education Committee had *de facto* been operating under Standing Rules proposed to the Faculty Senate this year. My interview with him took the 2012 proposed Standing Rules as the basis for answers to the questions above.

The Committee on Committees reports that:

1. The Standing Rules of the Distance Education Committee have been revised and the Faculty Senate (including the Committee on Committees) has been

asked to act on those revisions. As of the time of my meeting with Prof. Nielsen, the Committee on Committees had approved the change in Standing Rules.

Among the changes requested by the Distance Education Committee was to amend its name to the Online Education Committee. In our conversation, Prof. Nielsen explained that among the reasons for this recommendation was that a significant number of students taking courses online are not "distant," they are on OSU's Corvallis campus.

Prof. Nielsen explained that the Standing Rules as revised for 2012 were more reflective of the function of this committee because they reduced the specific tasks to which this committee was assigned in favor of a more realistic and valuable emphasis on this committee's ability to identify issues regarding online education at OSU and alert the stakeholders involved so that action could be taken in a timely manner.

Thus, the revised 2012 rules not only are seen to reflect the function and composition of this committee as presently comprised, but to best reflect the way it has performed in the immediate past.

2. The Distance Education Committee is satisfied that its actions, as described in its annual reports, are consistent with their Standing Rules. Prof. Nielsen emphasized that the last two years' reports were particularly good at reflecting the nature of the work this committee does.
3. As reported in item 2 above, the Distance Education Committee is satisfied that its annual reports provide an accurate and valuable memory of its activities and outcomes, with the caveat that the committee has been acting in the last two years in a manner more closely represented by the proposed 2012 rules than earlier Standing Rules.
4. There are no student members on this committee. It might be valuable to have student insight on this committee's decisions, but at present there are no student members. Neither the past nor the 2012 Standing Rules mandate a student member.
5. There are two ways this committee's activities connect to OSU's Strategic Plan: (1) improving graduate education, and (2) improving assessment. This committee has been attentive to the role graduate students play in online education, with an eye toward maintaining a balance between the quality of the education offered to students and the opportunity offered to graduate students to gain experience teaching. Assessment has also been a high-priority item for this committee. Changes in the OSU administration's assessment personnel might delay some plans to make side-by-side assessment of online and classroom courses feasible in the short term, but this committee is interested in developing a method for such assessment.
6. This committee considers its role to be identifying and, if possible, solving problems and issues related to online education. When problems are identified, the committee brings them to the faculty's attention (e.g., through the Faculty Senate). When solutions are identified, this committee seeks to monitor their implementation. This committee has no enforcement power, so

its primary effectiveness is through alerting the faculty about looming issues and the state of implementation of remedies.

7. N/A

8. Prof. Nielsen noted that the population of students who take courses online (whether they're on campus or not) is more diverse--particularly where gender is concerned--than the population in the OSU classrooms. This committee's attention to maintaining the integrity of online instruction protects students' ability to present their degrees and credentials with confidence that, regardless of how they took their classes, their degrees are vouched for by Oregon State University.

In addition to his responses to the specified questions, Prof. Nielsen noted that there are discussions underway to open a research center focused on online education, perhaps under the university's Research Office. Prof. Nielsen expressed support for this, since it could dovetail very well with the mission this committee has adopted (as reflected in the 2012 proposed rules). This committee could continue to gather information about issues regarding online education that need attention, and allow the research center to investigate them and bring data to the attention of relevant parties. The [proposed] Online Education Committee could then be helpful in briefing the Faculty Senate on the findings of the research center.