

Senate Ad-Hoc E-Learning Committee Final Report

17 April 2008

Preamble: The Senate ad-hoc E-Learning committee (Task Force) met over the past two semesters to make recommendations on University Policies and Procedures that relate to the conversion of existing courses to on-line courses, as well as the development of online programs. In making these recommendations, the Task Force recognizes that:

- A. There are a number of faculty committees at the university and college level that must be a part of specific decisions that ultimately affect pedagogical decisions on the delivery of curricula at Ferris State University.
- B. Online course management systems (e.g. WebCT, FerrisConnect, Tegrity, etc.) are used to varying degrees by faculty including: web enhancement (augmentation with some of the features, however all course requirements can be met in the traditional face-to-face classroom), fully online (all course requirements fulfilled online), and hybrid online (blended online) where some course requirements are met online and/or a portion of traditional “seat time” is fulfilled online.
- C. The adoption of new technology by faculty for the delivery of course materials requires ongoing training, technical support and resource allocation (e.g. computer, software, network connectivity, high speed access to the Internet).
- D. Different methods of curricular delivery (e.g. classroom-based, online-based, laboratory, practicum, and seminar) present unique workload implications.
- E. Ferris State University is in the process of implementing classroom technology requirements (podiums, digital projection, “smartpodiums/Sympodium”, etc.) to standardize the technology experience in the traditional “brick and mortar” classroom. Minimum requirements should also be established to insure consistency in the student’s “online classroom experience.”
- F. Students learn in different ways. Implementation of learning objectives and assessment methods should recognize that online instruction is a means to an end, and may not be the optimal way for every student to learn. As such, student orientation (FerrisConnect training) and screening (appropriate computer hardware, software and Internet connection) may be an essential component of online course and online program “roll out”, to insure every student has the opportunity to succeed.
- G. There are already quality control mechanisms in place for traditional courses and that those mechanisms must be adapted fairly to on-line courses.
- H. No one group or set of standards is in place to act as “sergeant-at-arms” over any of the systems currently in place. FerrisConnect and the staff that operates it is only there to assist and train.
- I. There are already Best Practices in place in the form of levels of online certification which is currently a voluntary peer review of portfolios.
- J. Faculty can be assigned to teach an online course and their only exposure to FerrisConnect may be the 16 hours of training provided by the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning.
- K. Some colleges and departments already have standards and guidelines in place and may be reluctant to change what has proven successful for them. Others have requirements of accreditation or certification that will not allow them to adopt new guidelines or use standardized delivery methods.

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The E-Learning Task Force, therefore makes the following recommendations:

1. The Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning and Academic Affairs insure training is available for all new faculty on the current online learning management system platform (e.g. FerrisConnect) as part of the first year orientation process. This may include a check-off for new faculty who may have experience with the system in place at Ferris from a previous institution.
2. Existing faculty receive orientation and training to FerrisConnect prior to migrating coursework from the WebCT platform to the FerrisConnect platform. Adequate resources need to continue to be allocated to the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning for any remaining faculty not yet trained.
3. The Academic Senate communicate to each college curriculum committee the need to review its policies and procedures to address (at least) the following:
 - a. Appropriate conversion of credit hours to online instruction time. For example, if an online class is created “from scratch” with no existing frame of reference to a “brick and mortar” offering, what determines the number of credit hours assigned to it?
 - b. Policies on release from classroom seat time in the case of a hybrid online course. In hybrid online delivery, the instructor may wish to release students from classroom “seat time” due to components of the course that are delivered on-line. Individual departments should have the authority to determine appropriate release time.
 - c. Dissemination of “technical course pre-requisites” to make students aware of minimum technology requirements (e.g. computer hardware, software, speed of Internet connection) for the course. These requirements should be tailored to the online applications being utilized.
 - d. “Caps” should be placed on the number of students in online sections if deemed to be different from traditional face-to-face courses.
 - e. Technical pre-requisites that may apply for hybrid online or fully online courses (e.g. computer hardware and software, Internet speed, etc.) should be determined for the course and disseminated to the student.
 - f. Additional student, ability-based pre-requisites that may be appropriate for more independent learning in the online environment should be determined for the course and disseminated to the student. This should include consideration of the course level (100, 200, 300, 400+ level courses).
 - g. Any unique student feedback that may need to be obtained, which is not addressed in the current Student Assessments of Instruction (SAI’s) should be added to the SAI or a standardized on-line evaluation adopted.
 - h. Best Practices similar to those of a traditional course be established and adhered to. As with any standard course, learning outcomes and assessment well thought out.
 - i. Any existing departmental/college policies, practices, or guidelines be reviewed to insure that they meet (at least) the above standards.
 - j. Courses with special certification/accreditation requirements and/or those requiring non-standard delivery methods (WebCT, FerrisConnect, Tegrity, etc.) should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis by their respective college curriculum committees.

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4. In addition to any necessary support that the college curriculum committees need to complete section 3, the University Curriculum Committee should insure that its policies and procedures address:
 - a. Appropriate identification of courses during the review and approval process to insure that students can identify web-enhanced, hybrid online, and fully online courses during the registration process.
 - b. UCC Form E adjustments needed to represent the content outline since "hours" may not be able to be quantified as is currently required for face-to-face meeting time.
5. University and college-level assessment policies and procedures address the unique nature of hybrid online and fully online courses, and insures that student achievement in online coursework meets similar standards as students in a "brick and mortar" environment.
6. That student training in the use of FerrisConnect be incorporated in any program that uses enhanced on-line, hybrid on-line, or fully on-line courses. This may be in the form of an FSUS-100 module or part of orientation. The FSUS-100 coordinator should be consulted.
7. Academic Program Review Committee should add online criteria to the list of evaluated items and/or insure that the outside accrediting agencies of programs evaluate online learning.
8. These recommendations are to be forwarded to the Ferris Faculty Association for review and comment as they may impinge on the current Collective Bargaining Agreement; and for consideration as part of future versions of that agreement.

Post amble:

It is the general consensus of the Task Force that academic freedom is paramount and that no one group, committee, or organization should impinge on academic freedom. That being said, the committee does recognize the need and requirement for standards that must be met to insure best practices and presenting a quality course and program be delivered to our students. Courses and programs which change to an on-line format (fully, hybrid, or enhanced) should be expected to present the same content and quality as a traditional course. However, a course or program placed on-line should not be expected to comply with content requirements not required by a traditional course. The above recommendations outline: Training, evaluation, best practices, work load issues, academic program review requirements, existing courses on-line, assessment, and training. It is the Task Force's belief that these are the principal issues in bringing an existing course or program to one of the three levels of online status.