Ad-Hoc Committee on Online Issues
Preliminary Report for February 2010 Faculty Senate Meeting

The Ad-Hoc Committee on Online Issues was charged with the study of six broad topics impacting online education at MSU. Those topics were:

1. Review peer institutions as to their policies regarding supplementary pay for online instructors and make recommendations to the Senate in January 2010.

2. Work in conjunction with the offices of Missouri State Online to formulate strategies for ensuring input from faculty on basic policies and procedures for technology in the classroom.

3. Secure a faculty senate representative on the university committee(s) that formulate, review, and propose changes to online policies.

4. Make recommendations for how departments can include online student evaluations in the regular departmental evaluation process, using the same and/or a similar instrument.

5. Make a recommendation to the Rules Committee no later than February 2010 regarding whether this ad hoc committee should become a standing Senate Committee.

6. Investigate and determine best practices for administering and teaching online courses by benchmarking with peer institutions and/or other appropriate sources.

These charges have led to a spirited and thoughtful dialog concerning online education and ways that it can be dealt with to ensure the quality of education commensurate of Missouri State University. It has not been an easy task and it is evident to all committee members that there are many more discussions to be held and decisions to be made before any consensus can be reached on the above tasks.

The purposes of this preliminary report are to update the Senate on the Committee's work and to promote discussion and feedback concerning online education. Based on this discussion and further deliberation, the committee intends to bring forth specific resolutions in the March 2010 Senate meeting. These resolutions will address online policy and online compensation issues.

Online education has grown at a fantastic rate nationally and at MSU. From 2002 to 2007 online enrollments have risen by an average annual growth rate of almost 20%. Nationally, it was reported in 2007 that over 3.9 million students were taking at least one class online in the fall of 2007. Locally online education has been growing at similar rates and online education has figured prominently in enrollment planning and long-range strategic plans. It is becoming clear that besides affective student retention rates, online education is perhaps the most valuable tool the university has for maintaining or expanding student enrollment.

To understand and study our charges the committee first had to come to an understanding of how online education came to be on this campus and how the current policies and procedures governing online were formulated. A brief history of online is in order.

A Short History of Online Instruction at Missouri State University

Online instruction at Missouri State University

Online instruction at Missouri State University originated with the creation of the Master of Science in Administrative Studies degree in fall, 1997. In the mid to late 90's, several trends led to the creation of the first fully online graduate degree at Missouri State University. First, the Coordinating Board for Higher Education in Missouri was awarding "start up" grants for the creation of new and innovative graduate programs that would meet the educational needs of Missouri residents. During this period the number of graduate degrees offered by the university doubled. Second, there was a growing interest in the concept of interdisciplinary graduate degrees in higher education. Third, distance education was starting to embrace the internet as a mainstream methodology for providing education to students at a distance.

A group of administrators and faculty worked to develop the MS in Administrative Studies degree to address these trends in graduate education and to capitalize on the funding being provided by CBHE. The initial proposal for a fully online graduate degree was not approved by the Faculty Senate in spring, 1996. Concerns about the original proposal included: skepticism over the efficacy of teaching online, locus of control for interdisciplinary degrees and concern over the potential negative impact on the MBA program. The proposal was revised over the following summer to address the core concerns and was approved by the Faculty Senate in fall, 1997. The first two online courses offered at MSU included Computer Information Systems taught by Dr. Vikram Sethi and Organizational Communication taught by Dr. John Bourhis in spring, 1998.

In spring of 1998, there were no policies or procedures in place to guide the development of online instruction at the university. Issues of compensation, administration, supervision, faculty governance and intellectual property rights as they applied to online instruction had not been discussed, let alone resolved. Online instruction was being developed within the College of Continuing Education as part of its Academic Outreach program. The MSAS program because of its interdisciplinary nature was being administered out of the Graduate College because of that college's interdisciplinary nature. Deans Ron Fairbairn and Frank Einhellig, along with Vice President Bruno Schmidt and Associate Vice President Kathy Pulley partnered to form a new committee charged with developing a set of policies and procedures to guide the development of online instruction at the university.

What is the origin of the Distance Learning and Internet-Based Instruction Policies and Procedures Committee (DIPP)?

> DIPP was a committee of administrators, staff and faculty charged with developing policies and procedures for internet-based instruction at the university. Members included: Bruno Schmidt, Kathy Pulley, Ron Fairbairn, Frank Einhellig, Steve Robinett and the Chair of the Faculty Senate. The committee would often meet on a weekly basis to develop a coherent and consistent set of policies and procedures to guide the development of online instruction. Faculty and staff were frequent guests to provide input to the formulation of these policies. The DIPP committee formulated many of the policies and procedures in place today, as well as a set of guiding principles for the growth of online instruction at the university

What were some of the guiding principles that DIPP generated for the development of online instruction at the university?

DIPP made a conscious and deliberate decision **not** to follow the model that was common in the late 1990's of requiring faculty to teach online as a condition of employment. DIPP was sensitive to the concerns expressed by the Faculty Senate in its rejection of the original MSAS proposal about faculty being required to teach using a format that they viewed with skepticism at the time.

DIPP preferred to use full-time faculty to teach online, especially at the graduate level. In its rejection of the original proposal the Faculty Senate expressed it concern that the introduction of online courses which were treated with great skepticism would result in the hiring of a second tier of faculty loosely affiliated with the university. This was a driving factor in many of the compensation policies discussed below.

DIPP believed that the decision of what courses could be taught online and who could teach them was a departmental and not an administrative or staff prerogative.

DIPP was committed to providing the best quality of instruction online. This was one reason that the use of adjunct faculty was discouraged at the graduate level. Faculty needed to have a commitment to the institution and meet all of the same requirements for faculty teaching on campus.

DIPP believed that those who were responsible for developing and teaching online should share in the "profitability" of those courses. Ron Fairbairn, Dean of the College of Continuing Education, embraced an entrepreneurial model in which "a rising tide would raise all boats." Faculty, departments and central administration should share in the growth and success of online instruction. This was not the typical model being followed within the state of Missouri or nationally. It was a conscious and deliberate decision made by administrators and faculty that influenced the development of online education at MSU.

What is the origin of the $55 per student supplemental payment to faculty?

DIPP approved a $55 per student supplemental payment to faculty who taught an online course offered in support of the MSAS program for several reasons. First, it was in recognition that teaching a course online involved significantly more effort and time compared to teaching the same course face-to-face. It was seen as just compensation for the additional work that faculty were expected to do associated with an online course. Second, it was a way of compensating faculty who were teaching online for the additional level of technology that was required to teach effectively. Faculty required high speed internet connections, laptops, wireless internet, mobile phones and better computers. The $55 supplemental fee provided a small measure of reimbursement for expenses incurred by faculty teaching online. Third, it was seen as a way of encouraging faculty to accept a few students over the recommended cap of 15 (for graduate courses). As online delivery grew to include undergraduate courses, this policy that was originally designed to support the MS in Administrative Studies program became university policy for all courses taught online at the university.

What is the origin of the $2400 "course buy out" for departments?

Departments that offered a course online in support of the MSAS program received $2400 per online course offered per semester. This policy was approved by DIPP for two

reasons. First, DIPP did not want departments hiring adjunct faculty to teach these courses online. The $2400 could be used by a department to hire adjunct faculty to teach a face-to-face course in order to free up a full-time faculty member to teach an course online. If the online course was taught in load, the department still received the $2400 which could be used to support graduate education in the department. Second, the $2400 was seen as a way of encouraging and rewarding departments for their participation in an interdisciplinary program, especially for using full-time faculty to teach online. As in the case of the $55 supplemental payment to faculty for teaching online in the MSAS degree, this policy was applied to all courses being taught online at the university.

What is the origin of the developmental grant for courses taught online?

The original degree proposal to the CBHE included resources to assist faculty in developing courses in support of the MSAS degree. This came in the form of a grant to a faculty member developing a course for online delivery. It's important to remember that at the time (late 1990's), support for the development of an online course was a telephone number to an instructional designer at Empire State College in New York. What is now MSU Online did not exist at the time these courses were being developed. The grant was compensation for the additional work that was required by faculty to translate a face-to-face course for delivery online in the absence of any assistance on campus. This policy was eventually applied to all courses being taught online at the university.

What happened to DIPP?

With a new university President came a new administrative structure and new administrators. The College of Continuing Education under which online instruction originated was broken up. The DIPP committee which had been responsible for managing the growth of online instruction as well as developing the policies and procedures for online instruction was dissolved. Key administrators and faculty left the university and along with them the organizational memory of why certain decisions were made (the $55 per student supplemental payment to faculty, grants to support development of new courses, "course buy out" funds for departments and the guiding principles that shaped those decisions). Resources that were formally provided by the College of Continuing Education to support the compensation policies developed by DIPP for online instruction were turned over to the deans of the colleges in which online courses were being taught. In an era of decentralization a void in leadership has been created that has led to a reconsideration of many issues that had previously been considered settled.

Current Trends and Issues in Online Education

To better understand the current trends and issues in online education, the committee contacted numerous peer and non-peer institution to gain information concerning their online policies. Most of the institutions contacted had a significant presence in online education. However, two peer institutions did not have a significant presence or interest in online education. Additional compensation for developing or teaching online courses was noted in many of the institutions contacted. There was no consistent trend or method of compensation from one institution to another. Compensation strategies among the institutions contacted include the following:

- Stipends or fixed pay for developing an online course

- Compensation per student credit hour to the faculty member or department
- Stipends for substantial redevelopment of existing online courses
- Fixed pay (example $6,000) for teaching online out of load

Other trends noted from the institutions contacted include a centralized technical support and training center for online education and recommended training for faculty new to online teaching.

The first draft of findings is presented below in outline form. Included are key points or issues and guiding principles that the committee used to guide current discussions and that should guide future inquiry and policy making as well.

Governance Issues (Structure/Faculty Input/On line Policies)

Key Issues

- Decentralization of online procedures has led to confusion and problems.
- Faculty input has not been as strong as it could be regarding online teaching.
- Policies and procedures regarding online are haphazard and unevenly administered.
- Intellectual property rights of faculty developing and teaching online courses should be clarified and protected.
- A clear definition of what constitutes "online" courses is needed.
- A clear picture of what online education means to MSU needs to be generated.
- A better understanding of online teaching and student populations is needed so that communication strategies can target and engage all faculty members.
- Consistent communication with all faculty and administrators regarding the role and purpose of online learning programs as they relate to academic mission and academic quality is needed.
- Campus leaders need to identify strategies to acknowledge and recognize the additional time and effort faculty invest in online as compared to face-to-face teaching and learning.
- Online learning activities are strengthened by the centralization of some organizational structures and administrative functions that support and sustain the programs.

Guiding Principles

- Faculty Input is essential to quality of online programs.
- Having policies and procedures that support rather than hinder growth and development of online is crucial.
- Effective governance is essential to quality and to expanding future online programs.

Best Practices

Key Issues
- Numerous examples of "best practices" exist in the online world.
- Adoption of best practices will benefit online courses through better instruction and site development.

- Faculty should be trained and approved for online delivery before teaching online courses.
- Whenever possible, courses taught online should be staffed with full-time faculty.
- Development of online policy relating to "best practices" should involve close interaction between faculty representation and Missouri State Online.
- The ability and willingness to teach online should be a component of job descriptions for future hires within departments that offer instruction in this format.
- Technical Infrastructure – Access, Help Desk, Course Management Systems, Training Facilities is necessary to support best practices.
- Increased staff support may be necessary if online education is to be expanded to the program level.
- Key areas of instructional best practices include Materials, Rubrics, Objectives, Assessment, Feedback, Organization, Presentation, Technology usage, Engagement strategies, Content, Support and Accessibility.

Guiding Principles
- Quality is job #1 (online course quality should meet or exceed the expectations for courses offered in the traditional classroom)

- Institutional support must be in place to ensure that "best practices" are attainable.

Evaluation

Key Issues

- Proper course evaluation is critical in maintaining teaching accountability and quality.

Guiding Principles

- Evaluation must be done.
- Evaluation should support teaching and learning.
- Evaluation should be fair and uniformly administered.
- Evaluation should be based on best practices.
- Evaluation should be supported by pre-service as well as in-service faculty development.
- Evaluation must be multi-faceted and from multiple sources.

Compensation Issues

Key Issues

- There is no consensus among peer institutions concerning compensation for online instruction.
- There is no consensus among peer institutions concerning compensation for online development.
- The above applies to non-peer institutions that were surveyed as well.

- Comparison is difficult among "peer" institutions because there is a difference in emphasis placed on online instruction, different work load policies and support mechanisms.
- As it exists today, additional compensation represents more of an "offset" for additional work and expenses than as an "incentive".
- Existing compensation packages for online work at MSU are not out of line with many of the institutions that offer such packages and they allow for the high expectations and quality established by the university.
- Courses needing major reconstruction should be considered as a new development.

Guiding Principles
- The additional work for online education should be compensated.
- Online development must be supported and compensated.