

To: University Senate

From: Joe Brooks, Lynn Clark, Robin Flanagan, Russell Gladstone(Chair), William Joel, Janet Ohles, Shouhua Qi, Stephen Veillette/Todd McInerney, Robert Veneziano

RE: 2003-2004 Annual Report of the Committee On Distance Education

Date: May 10, 2004

This report describes the current status of the issues addressed in the *Recommendations (Rationale) of the Distance Education AD Hoc Committee Report of May 2000*, as well as the work dealing with these issues that the committee has done during this year. The membership decided to use this report's structure to reflect on the progress and obstacles we face developing the educational and infrastructure components identified as critical to Distance Education at WCSU.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Recommend the senate establish a Distance Education Standing Committee including appropriate administrative representation to report to the senate twice a year.

Rationale: Ongoing examination of this issue is imperative.

The Committee on Distance Education was established by the University Senate, by laws approved April 18, 2001 (R-01-03-02) President Roach Approved May 1, 2001.

2. Recommend the standing committee develop and administer a survey to faculty who have taught online through eCollege or another method to determine methods and strategies used, satisfaction, and other "lessons learned."

Rationale: Faculty who have had experience teaching in a distance learning environment can provide expertise pertinent to WCSU.

The committee conducted a survey during the Spring 2002 semester, which was sent to 288 full and part-time teaching faculty, of which 75 responded. A report of survey was presented to the University Senate.

3. Recommend that the administration for the four CSU institutions articulate jointly the requirements and procedures for integrating courses across the system (core courses should be accepted by all CSU institutions; prerequisites, full-time or part-time, using computer fees to pay for eCollege).

Rationale: A fully integrated system is necessary for distance education to be effective and successful for students and faculty

Online CSU offers full programs in several areas of study representing CCSU(MS in Data Mining), ECSU(MS in Educational Technology), and SCSU(MS in Library Science & Sixth- Year Certificate in Educational Foundations), while WCSU offers courses providing our students with a virtual option to fill some of their General Education

requirements. Clarification of any articulation issues between campuses would be useful to better understand how the CSU collectively views and supports Distance Education. Recommendation #3 mixed several issues together that would be better addressed separately. The idea that the four CSUs, now five with Online CSU, "*articulate jointly the requirements and procedures for integrating courses across the system,*" is a conversation certainly worth having to provide everyone with a understanding of the expectations from each CSU entity. The answer would provide insight as to how we can help all CSU students take full advantages of the opportunities available with courses or programs offered at the other CSUs via Distance Education.

4. Recommend that the administration support faculty with time, support, and funding to learn more about available technology and to help instructors and departments explore courses that may be suitable to distance education. As part of this, recommend that a distance education consultant be hired as part of the instructional technology staff to be available for group training, and for one-on-one training.

Rationale: Without proper support and training many faculty will not have the opportunity to participate in distance education. Without faculty participation distance education will fail.

The realization of distance education consultant has yet to be accomplished at WCSU. Some training has been conducted over the last two years in software applications such as ERes and WebCT. Requests from our faculty to have forums to discuss the implications on pedagogy of enhancing on ground course environments with online support continues to increase. They are looking for expertise and experience to help support either a transition to, or the initial development of courses. The support must go well beyond the technical foundations of software implementation, but strive to shed light on how course content is best delivered and supported by the faculty for the students. University Computing has provided numerous WebCT training opportunities, and created default templates for every course offered, should the teaching faculty want to activate them. In addition, the Library has provided individual and group training for ERes, with support in place for faculty, administrators, and centers currently providing virtual venues for access to course content. In addition, some faculty have developed their own Web pages, either hosted through University Computing, or hosted on servers outside the campus network, to enhance their own on ground courses. Each of these options requires of the faculty member a commitment of time to be trained, as well as time and expertise to maintain the these resources.

5. Recommend that faculty be surveyed to determine needs concerning knowledge and training for distance education, and to determine which courses might be suitable for distance education.

Rationale: Since participation in distance education must be initiated by faculty and departments it is imperative for them to state their knowledge, attitudes, skills, and needs to facilitate planning and policy.

The survey conducted in Spring 2002 answered some of the questions concerning faculty knowledge and training needs. A follow-up survey may prove to be useful to help the university determine if we are meeting the needs of faculty now that a substantial numbers are using some enhancements to their on ground teaching.

Current ERes Statistics:

Faculty Accounts: 184

Active Courses: 291

Archived Courses: 202

Current WebCT Statistics:

Faculty Accounts: Not available

Active Courses: Not available

Archived Courses: Not available

6. Recommend that WCSU make use of eCollege for putting courses online during a time in which WCSU examines course management tools and develops standards that tools must meet to be selected for use at WCSU. Following the examination, a course management tool that best meets the need of WCSU may be selected.

Rationale: While not perfect, eCollege provides a framework for courses to be offered and for the most part is adequate for the time being. Since other course management tools may be more appropriate it is important to examine them to determine what benefit each offers.

A choice was made by University Computing, with a select group of WCSU faculty, to contract with WebCT to be WCSU's course management software.

7. Recommend the Senate and the standing distance education committee examine teaching and learning as it is conducted throughout the university as well as the role of distance education in the teaching and learning.

Rationale: Distance education should fall within the purview of the mission of CSU, WCSU, and Schools. As the paradigm shifts from teaching to learning, it is important to assess the role that distance education has in that paradigm.

A need to bring an assessment component to bear on courses delivered wholly on line, or on ground enhanced courses, should be a routine process at a minimum, and consideration of more comprehensive analysis to better understand the effectiveness of the courses supported by these virtual environments. Assessment in this area could be a focal point for local faculty research.

8. Recommend the Senate examine issues of governance where distance education is concerned.

Rationale: Distance education is an extension of what is currently under governance but it offers some unique issues that should be discussed.

There are on going concerns about issues including enrollment, copyright, course ownership, evaluation, and release time. These are issues that need attention and resolution as the DE becomes increasing integrated into WCSU, and OnLine CSU.

9. Recommend departments determine criteria for instruction and courses that are suitable for distance education.

Rationale: Departments and individual faculty best know their disciplines, goals, objectives, and methods so it is imperative that they determine which courses might be suitable for distance education

A survey of current practice in each school / department would need to be done to determine the guidelines, or criteria, currently in place. In our Committee meeting (4/15/04) draft minutes reflect that "guidelines should be constructed, and procedures required, to determine who renders the final determination of approval for DE course proposals." A standard model elsewhere is the granting of release time and credit after the DE course has been created.

Is this a governance issue within a department or a school?

10. Recommend the Administration develop a written institutional plan which delineates policy and vision concerning the role of distance education at WCSU before faculty commit to participating in the endeavor.

Rationale: To be successful, there must be a vision and well laid out plan that delineates the role that distance education will have in WCSU and within CSU; support, resources, training, technology, and funding.

The University Strategic Plan is appropriate place to address the core concerns regarding how Distance Education can be integrated into the academic life of WCSU. The current draft (March 2004) of the University Strategic Plan refers to Distance Education twice, first; in a footnote as a weakness, and a second time peripherally; to OnlineCSU. Strong consideration should be given to adding Distance Education to the University Strategic Plan prior to the final adoption.

Conclusions/Reflections

If Distance Education is to begin to fulfill the potential that it is touted to provide, support for and nurturing of the faculty who will drive the effort must be relevant as well as robust. If the nature of Distance Education can be compared to a utility, it is a basic infrastructure that requires investment, planning, and the sustained commitment to

reinvention in order for it to flourish. As in many educational support endeavors, one model, one size, or one vendor's software does not fit all applications. If University Computing can mesh the rigors of technical support with the adaptability needed to provide the widest range of support for academic endeavors, a productive partnership can be sustained. One path to discovering "best practice" is to provide the opportunities for Colloquium organized around specific academic disciplines, or software, providing either outside expertise, or the expertise of our own faculty, who can share their experiences in teaching and learning. Questions about the usefulness of creating courses in a specific discipline in either full online courses, or in enhanced on ground courses must be part of the fundamental discussions based on sound pedagogy. Issues in the areas of information literacy, computer literacy, and learning styles need to be addressed to help the university community grapple with the multidimensional obstacles and challenges to providing successful distance education courses.