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23 June 2011

Interim President Phyllis Wise  
University of Washington

Dear Dr. Wise,

Members of the Faculty Council on Teaching and Learning recognize that the movement towards provision of more courses on-line is an important step to bringing the university's programs in line with student preferences and needs. Students like on-line content and the ability to review lectures and notes, and are increasingly sophisticated in their use of electronic tools and expectations for their use in teaching and learning. The demands of family, work and other aspects of modern society limit the ability of many students to spend extended amounts of time on campus. Developing additional methods to meet students' learning needs in alternative locations and times is appropriate tasks for the modern university and faculty. Movement towards on-line education may also be seen as a means to increase class enrollment without expansion of current resources. Members of the Council are concerned about the implications of these changes in course delivery for educational quality, faculty time and costs.

During this past year, the Council has held several discussions about this issue, and attempted to seek evidence about the use of on-line education around issues of quality of instruction, faculty time, class size and cost. This letter summarizes our discussions and concerns.

First, the Council recognizes that on-line learning can mean many different things, from fully on-line asynchronous learning where students can complete all course requirements on their own schedules to fully interactive synchronous learning that replicates the classroom in many locations. The choice of specific on-line methods for a course will depend both on the content and objectives of the course.

#### Educational quality

- There is no conclusive evidence that on-line education per se is better or worse than traditional methods of college learning. Some studies show increases in learning, particularly in declarative content. Other studies indicate that on-line activities used to augment more traditional learning can be effective and increase retention.
- As on-line tools have gotten more advanced, instructors now can provide interactions and experiences that previously were not available in the on-line format. The quality of the tool, the ability of the instructor to use the tool, and the appropriateness of the tools in meeting the needs of the students will determine its success.
- Maintaining actual and perceived quality in education requires interaction between faculty and students. Student satisfaction with on-line courses is related to the degree of perceived interaction with instructors.
- Methods that blend on-line learning with interactive learning result in better outcomes than totally asynchronous, independent methods.
- Other aspects of education, building community and collaboration within the class, are made more difficult as more is put online. It's important to consider not just learning outcomes but also the educational experience, interaction, and campus community.

References: 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19, 24, 25, 26, 27, 30, 31, 31

#### Faculty effort

- Time needed for development of on-line courses can be significant.
- Continuing maintenance of course content after initial implementation may also require significant faculty time.

- Some studies have found that on-line courses require more time spent by faculty per student than in more traditional class formats, particularly activities requiring writing and on-line discussions.
- Reductions in time commitment for faculty may be found in totally free-standing courses that do not include online interactions.
- Moving towards a model of a community of learners, where the members of the class provide comment and direction to peers may reduce the level of faculty direction, and consequently time per student, in a course. This may be more appropriate for graduate study than undergraduate courses.

References<sup>2, 12, 22, 23, 32, 33</sup>

### Class size

- The additional demands for interaction between students and instructors in teacher moderated on-line courses reduces the ideal class size compared with more traditional formats of teaching.
- Larger class sizes may be possible if adjunct faculty and staff are used to moderate and provide most individual interaction with students in place of regular faculty.
- Students may be sensitive to the substitution of less qualified instructors for regular faculty, and may become even more sensitive as planned tuition increases are imposed.

References<sup>16, 17, 21, 28, 29, 33, 34</sup>

### Costs of on-line education

- Moving to on-line education takes time and effort. Development time must be taken into account, including time spent with the initial development of on-line course materials, ongoing maintenance of those materials, and adoption of new technologies.
- All faculty members are not native users of on-line technology in teaching, and must be trained and supported in the use of these tools in order for quality of instruction to be maintained.
- On-line education methods have increased the numbers of students enrolled in a class at other institutions with significant cost savings. These savings are realized primarily from the use of adjunct personnel to handle most day-to-day interactions with students. In this mode, costs are shifted to less expensive personnel without any claimed reduction in quality of instruction.

References<sup>2, 16, 28, 29, 33, 34</sup>

Movement of appropriate instruction to on-line delivery is an important task for consideration by the university if it is to keep pace with student interests and competition within the environment of higher education. At the same time, we need to be aware that any good class, whether in person or online, will be more than simply a delivery system. We must continue to emphasize the worth of interactivity and engagement between students, faculty, and course content. There are many options for on-line learning, but our focus needs to be on the appropriate technology and setting in which students will best reach the learning goals of our programs.

We believe the move to increased on-line education is not an option, based on the interests and needs of our students, the rapid and continued maturation of educational technologies, and the growing body of literature that supports the strategic use of these technologies to enhance traditional educational practices. The University should attempt to become leader in quality education using these modalities while realizing that on-line education alone will probably not result in increased enrollment in our programs for less cost. Faculty will need support in mastery of on-line technology, the development of curriculum, and the maintenance of these programs. While adjunct staff may support or extend the work of faculty in on-line instruction, the teaching faculty of the university remain a major asset to its programs.

Consequently, members of the council request that the following actions be considered;

- The information we have reported in this letter be made available for future discussions of these issues with the Board of Regents, Board of Deans, and other administrative groups considering these issues. We also request that members of the Council be included in these discussions.
- Adequate technologic infrastructure to support on-line learning needs to be developed and implemented to insure the success of any educational offering.

- Support for the development of skills in use of technology and adaption of pedagogic methods to on-line learning should be provided to faculty.
- Any shift in educational responsibility from teaching faculty to temporary, adjunct, or lower paid instructors in implementation of on-line teaching should be monitored carefully for effects educational quality, learning outcomes for those courses, as well as indirect effects on more traditional programs.
- Faculty compensation for new teaching responsibilities in on-line educational efforts, including development of materials and courses and the supervision of adjunct staff must be developed and implemented.
- Methods to recognize the scholarly contribution of faculty in these efforts must be developed and included in decisions about merit and promotion.
- Courses chosen for on-line education need to be chosen judiciously, with decisions based on the appropriateness of goals and objectives of the course for use of on-line technology.

Yours,

Jan D Carline, Professor  
Chair, Faculty Council on Teaching and Learning

CC:

JW Harrington, Chair of the Faculty Senate

Susan Astley, Vice Chair of the Senate

Marcia Killien, Secretary of the Faculty

Kelly Trosvig, Interim Vice President and Vice Provost, UW Information Technology

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