

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
FACULTY COUNCIL ON EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH

The Faculty Council on Educational Outreach met at 9:00 a.m. on Thursday, **November 7, 2002**. Chair Steve Buck presided.

Approval of the minutes

The minutes of the October 10, 2002 FCEO meeting were approved.

Draft memo about the Distance Learning Course Application form

Buck said the memo from the FCEO Distance Learning Subcommittee suggesting corrections and additions to the Distance Learning Course Application form will be submitted to the University Curriculum Office. Tim Washburn, Director, Admissions and Records, was in accord with the suggested changes.

Discussion of issues re Distance Learning courses raised by the University Curriculum Office

Buck said a set of questions about Distance Learning courses needs further discussion. These questions “were touched on last year, but some were left less than explicit, and need clarification.”

Buck said that, with respect to the issue of “boundaries,” or “characteristics of DL-status courses,” there are three categories that require closer scrutiny: 1) courses presented in print-based media (especially, asynchronous courses, in which students do not start or end the course at the same time); 2) mixed-mode courses (containing both DL and classroom components): This is the category expected to show the greatest growth in the coming years; it must be decided whether to call the courses in this category “Distance Learning” or “classroom” courses; and 3) DL course requirements and DL designation: Do they apply to graduate, as well as to undergraduate, courses? Buck said, “We need to make some sort of recommendation on these.”

Buck asked for council comments or questions regarding the conversion of some of the existing “C”-prefix courses to DL-status courses. Warnick asked, “Is the “C”-prefix a designation that goes on the transcript?” Buck said it does go on the transcript. He said courses that *fit* DL courses must be offered and transcribed as DL courses.

Buck was asked about the difference between correspondence and Distance Learning courses. He said the bulk of courses offered in the DL format were offered in UWEO (University of Washington Educational Outreach) and designated with the “C”-prefix. He said Distance Learning legislation stipulated the phasing out of “C”-prefix courses and the establishing of DL-suffix courses, to be reviewed similarly to classroom courses.

These courses did not used to be “equivalent.” Distance Learning legislation stipulates that all DL-designated courses be “equivalent” to classroom courses. And where an “equivalent” classroom course already exists, the Distance Learning course must meet the same learning objectives as the classroom course. Also, a DL course, in the application process, must justify the necessity of a DL format for the course in lieu of a classroom, face-to-face format.

Szatmary said that, regarding “C”-designated courses up for review, “These courses *were* print-based, and are now online. They are mostly text-based courses, with E-mail access to the instructor.” A serious issue is that most of these courses are asynchronous. Students start and finish the courses at different times. “It is difficult to build student-to-student inter-activity, though student-to-instructor inter-activity *is* possible and is present in all these classes.”

Buck said, “‘C’-designated courses are being phased out to ensure that all courses, whether classroom or DL-suffix, undergo the same review process.” He said the “overarching principle is that a course with a particular number should be as ‘equivalent’ as possible, regardless of the format in which it is taught.” He said issues that Distance Learning courses face will depend on their being synchronous or asynchronous, and their being text-based or other-based.

Buck said, “On any single dimension, any course might be inferior to another.” He said text-based and asynchronous courses “represent the two sides of this issue.” He said the council, last year, did not mean to exclude text-based courses, but most courses were moving to being Web-based courses, a move “that could benefit those beyond the instructor and students. There would also, he noted, be a “student-to-student benefit also.”

Buck said, “We felt it important, in recommendations for the design and evaluation of DL-suffix courses, to address the question: How will the structure of a DL course meet the learning objectives of the course?” Warnick said it is important to keep in mind that some students do not have access to the requisite technology for certain structures in DL instruction. Szatmary said, “All our DL courses *now* are online, Web-based courses. According to the Distance Learning legislation, if someone does not have access to the necessary technology, they will not be able to take such courses in a certain number of years.”

Warnick reiterated her point about access to high end technology. “In some parts of the country, people do not have any access to high end technology.” Such people, she noted, would be entirely excluded from these kinds of courses. Buck said, “The University has to report to the HEC Board on the format of our courses. The HEC Board has specific criteria for DL courses. *We* choose not to be as specific as the HEC Board on what determines a course’s meriting a DL-suffix or not.”

Paul LePore, Director, Undergraduate Program Development, said, “We need to start with the learning objective, and not with the delivery mode of instruction.” He said that requiring student interaction in DL courses does not make sense: to *have* to use certain technology just because we *have* it. As far as technology five years from now is concerned, the *which* in *which technology* will have changed.” LePore noted that “there are many kinds of classes that have limited student interaction. In Sociology, we have many classes *without* student interaction.”

Szatmary said there are “arguments for both sides: for asynchronous and synchronous DL instruction. It’s hard to get student-to-student interaction in asynchronous DL courses. Students are at different stages of learning in the course. Some students already have taken tests that other students are preparing for.”

Carolyn Plumb, chair, Faculty Council on Academic Standards, said, “We should make a distinction between learning objectives and pedagogical method. The same learning objectives can be achieved through various pedagogical methods.”

Berger asked, “Do courses meet the criteria of real equivalence?” Buck said the prevailing point of view is that, at this time, “We need to distinguish between Distance Learning and classroom courses; these formats resolve issues *differently*.”

Tim Washburn, Executive Director, Admissions and Records, said, “DL courses do not satisfy residence requirements. These courses do count in the GPA, but do not go toward the 45-credit residence requirement.” Buck said the FCEO recommendations stipulated that DL-suffix courses have to be designed in such a way as to show *how* a particular type of interaction available will meet the learning objectives of the course. He said, “This needs to be addressed and explained.”

Washburn said the Curriculum Office seeks guidance in answering the question: “Do we expect these courses to go through a transformation?” He also asked, “How much student-to-student and student-to-instructor interaction should there be?” He suggested that “working alone does not get the same outcome as working together in a group. There is a need for group exchange.” He quoted from an article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (November 1, 2002) in which Larry E. Penley, dean of the College of Business at Arizona State University, says that working in small groups in an online course is as important as doing so in face-to-face courses. It is important for learning, and helps keep online students from dropping out, “because your colleagues support you, work with you, and have expectations for you.”

Washburn said, “We need to go beyond even the normal class in interaction [in DL courses]. We have a non-completion rate of 50% in correspondence courses.” He asked if, in a Distance Learning asynchronous course, “you can create a coming together sometime in the course [a face-to-face meeting of students and instructor]?”

Szatmary said, “We need to take more time on the application form. They need to be more thorough and clear.” Warnick asked, “What does research and empirical studies tell us? You could argue that younger learners need more, not less, interaction.” Szatmary said, “Different learners learn differently. Some students learn better working more independently.” Buck said, “It is clear to the council that some formats would not work in Distance Learning, *but there are* courses that will work in DL for some students. But some students’ learning style will not work in DL.”

Buck said a crucial question is “whether a Distance Learning format is sufficient to meet the learning objectives also met by the equivalent classroom course.” Berger said this and related questions need to be evaluated even more carefully for asynchronous than for synchronous courses. LePore said, “We need to recognize that learning styles do vary. Some of our language students do better alone than through interaction.”

Faculty Senate vice chair Doug Wadden asked, “Are the HEC Board tracking courses still being done?” Washburn said, “Yes, that’s still being tracked.” Wadden said, “The technology may become more seamless, but it won’t disappear. Many students are influenced by time availability and other factors. We can’t ignore these factors. And the ‘C’-designation could be left alone. We weren’t talking about a wholesale move of ‘C’ courses to Distance Learning. And as for ‘interaction,’ that concept has multiple facets.”

Washburn asked, “How difficult would it be to ask the instructor of a DL course to have a place for students to get together?” Szatmary said, “With students starting the [asynchronous] course at different times, there are practical, not technical, problems. Students in such a course are at different stages of learning *in the same program*. They could be sharing information on exams that some have already taken, and that others have yet to take. And that is just one practical problem among many.” Buck said, “These difficulties may vary with different courses, but yes, in the asynchronous courses, the difficulties are much greater.”

Washburn said, “We could ask that *at least* E-mail instruction be stipulated as a possibility for interaction in such courses, and that its use be encouraged.” Plumb asked, “What percentage of UWEO courses are asynchronous?” Szatmary said, “At the undergraduate level, 90%. We have two different markets. 57% of our students are matriculated; the rest are non-matriculated. The non-matriculated students represent a wide range of age, education, and DL course selection. Some students want flexibility: to be able to sign up whenever they want. These students prefer asynchronous courses. There may always be some students who want asynchronous courses.”

Buck said, “Whatever the course is, what is important is *how* the delivery modes in *that* course address the learning outcome. And, where a DL course has an equivalent classroom course, it must address the same learning objectives as the classroom course. That is in the Distance Learning legislation. There needs to be explicit attention paid to learning objectives.” The council expressed general agreement on this stipulation.

Buck said, “As for courses that have a component here on campus, but also have a non-classroom component as well: how do we handle these courses? (These are courses that cannot be taken by someone in Iowa.) Given the structure we have, how do we deal with them? Where do we go in the future in defining new kinds of structures?”

Wiegand said the University has “hybrid” courses at present in which students meet face-to-face on campus several times a quarter, and conduct the rest of the course via Distance Learning modes. She said UW Bothell “does several courses like this.” Though she added that Jane Decker, Associate Dean in the Chancellor’s Office at UW Bothell, has said these courses should not be called Distance Learning.

Buck said, “On the FCEO subcommittee, we wanted mixed-mode courses to be designed with a delivery mode in mind; that it would ‘come up’ in the mode in which it would be delivered.” LePore said, “The important thing is that the syllabi spell out clearly what the course will entail.” Buck said, “Students need to know what the expectations of a particular course will be.” Wiegand said, “A student suggested that the information in the Course Application form be made available to students.” Wadden said, “Perhaps the general application forms could be modified to address what is designated in a course.”

Washburn said, “Perhaps we could integrate the course information into the Libraries’ data base. What you’ve said today is that we can continue to have high standards as we move courses from Correspondence to Distance Learning. Students should communicate with their instructors in DL courses, and, where possible, with each other. And Course Application forms and syllabi should clearly elaborate what Distance Learning courses will involve.”

Szatmary said, “We’ll be having more of what are called ‘Edge’ courses (and other graduate-level courses), and these should be coded as Distance Learning courses, if they haven’t been previously.” Buck said, “It’s going to be an upcoming issue.”

Next meeting

The next FCEO meeting is set for Thursday, December 5, 2002, at 9:00 a.m., in 36 Gerberding Hall.
Brian Taylor, Recorder

PRESENT: *Professors* Buck (Chair), Berger, DeYoung, Goldsmith, Warnick and Wells;
Ex-officio members Deardorff and Szatmary;
Guests Paul LePore, Director, Undergraduate Program Development; Carolyn Plumb, chair, Faculty Council on Academic Standards; Doug Wadden, Faculty Senate vice chair; and Tim Washburn, Executive Director, Admissions and Records.

ABSENT: *Professors* Jenkins and Kim;
Ex-officio members Warbington and Johnston