DISTANCE LEARNING CONCERNS

Prepared for Dr. Pam Northrup
To Enhance the Senate Executive Committee’s Understanding at its
July 7, 2006, 8:30 Meeting in Building 10, Room 131

Note: This list is based on the Distance Learning Goals established at the Faculty Senate Retreat on January 13, 2006, with elaboration of some items based on discussions at the Retreat and in the Senate Executive Committee, as well as email correspondence.

1. How does distance learning fit into UWF’s Vision, Mission, and other aspects of the Strategic Plan, i.e., the University’s direction, advertised competitive advantage of small classes, etc.?

2. What are the focused goals for distance learning and the target audience(s)? Does the University, as well as its colleges and is departments, have plans in place for course offerings, or do we just use market reaction to guide us?

3. What are the effects and benefits to the students?

4. How much faculty choice is there regarding the use of distance learning, i.e., to what extent do faculty have a say in the decision making?
   
   Are there any unique academic freedom issues related to online courses? And what about the issue of intellectual property? In other words, who owns courses prepared for online? Are courses sometimes prepared by one individual and then given to someone else to teach?

5. How much control do departments have regarding use of distance learning and the use of adjuncts to teach such courses?
   
   How much of the distance learning classes are being taught by adjuncts? What are future projections?

   How many courses are using a faculty member as “instructor of record” and then farming the courses off to adjuncts and graduate assistants?

   What is UWF’s policy and practice of using adjuncts and grad assistants to work with online courses? How is their
work delineated? And how is this communicated to the students?

6. Do students always have the choice of classroom vs. distance learning delivery of their courses within a given semester? In other words, are on-campus students sometimes forced to take a DL course and or are some students forced to take a traditional course who would like to take a DL course, and how often?

7. Are there any established limits on distance learning offerings, e.g., is there a percentage limit for courses that will be offered as distance learning over the next 5 years? What are the different means/mechanisms of offering distance learning courses? Currently, what percentages of courses are being taught through distance learning by each of these means, and what percentage are being only taught only through distance learning?

8. Is the effect of increases in distance learning courses on classroom utilization being taken into account?

9. Does UWF have a comprehensive handbook/policy manual with all of the necessary information for distance learning that is representative of university, faculty, and student needs?

10. Are the values/essence/soul of education being preserved with the development of distance learning?

11. What quality-control policies are in effect for new and existing distance learning courses? What methods have been developed for assessing the quality and rigor of distance learning courses? Some specific concerns:

Are distance learning courses at this University just repackaged “correspondence courses?” In the words of one on-line course instructors, “My goal is to help you learn this material. I can’t “teach” it to you. This is, essentially, a self-taught course. I am here to assist you. My tutors are here to assist you.” Is this what we really want?

Who evaluates online teachers? Are chairs going into the online course to evaluate? How does this compare with the frequency of department chair visitations to traditional classroom classes?
Do we have any data on whether the quality of an online course is equal to a face-to-face classroom course for the student at this University?

Are faculty being adequately trained and provided with necessary resources? We realize training does exist; however, what percentage of faculty teaching on-line courses actually utilize the training?

Do we provide the same assistance (both financial and pedagogical) for faculty wanting to improve traditional courses? For example, do we offer financial bonuses to faculty creating new traditional courses in the same way we do for on line courses?

12. What examination policies and procedures exist for monitoring testing/assessment in online distance learning courses, e.g., how are exams proctored? Indeed, are exams proctored? If so, who makes arrangements for the proctors, how are proctors compensated, and how do we determine the appropriateness of the proctors?

13. Do we assess, identify and prioritize resources for distance learning courses to ensure optimal delivery, e.g., with respect to infrastructure?

14. Is there any effort to increase funding for development and teaching of distance learning courses?

15. Should we charge students more for distance learning courses, considering changing technology costs, with surplus funds given back to the appropriate academic unit/faculty?

16. Do we distinguish Internet-delivered courses that are truly distance learning and that provide an educational opportunity for those who would not otherwise be able to take traditional classes, from those that are not truly distance learning?

17. Should the Faculty Senate establish a comprehensive Senate policy for distance learning courses?