

## **Motion *re* Formation of an Internal Governance Committee on Online Education**

### **Referred by Faculty Issues Committee**

#### **Motion**

The Faculty Senate recommends the addition of the following language to the *Radford University Internal Governance System and University Committees and Councils*:

#### **Committee on Online Education**

**Function:** Monitors and guides the policies and practices associated with the implementation, assessment and improvement of quality in online and hybrid education. Recommends strategies for ensuring that teaching handbook policies meet the needs of online education and facilitates the development of a common language that highlights the overlap and intersections in the various approaches to online education that are currently being used. Shares policy recommendations with all affected parties and reviews feedback from such parties as well as the Faculty Senate prior to widespread dissemination of these proposals. Thus, this committee will be responsible for the development and dissemination of a university-wide policy associated with online and hybrid education, subject to the approval of the Provost and the Faculty Senate.

**Membership Composition:** Six T & R faculty, one elected from each college for a 2-year term; one representative each from McConnell library, the DRO, assessment, and the Center for Instructional Technology and Learning (CITL), appointed or elected by the respective unit; and one academic chair and one dean, appointed by the Provost. Half of the first group of members will be appointed for 1-year terms in order to create a staggered turn-over of members.

**Designated Administrator:** Provost for Academic Affairs

#### **Rationale**

In much of the discourse surrounding the current challenges to post-secondary education in the U.S. (e.g., funding, cost, and addressing the needs of diverse traditional and non-traditional students) technology is increasingly playing a role in how educational organizations respond to this current state of affairs. As a result, the University will benefit from the formation of an Internal Governance Committee on Online Education to facilitate and engender a public and sustainable university-wide conversation about online education. This new IG will be a proactive force for harnessing, responding to, and implementing online education in appropriate ways and venues in the university. Above all, it will give faculty a strategic role in responding to the many issues created by a move, no matter how small or large, toward online education.

The Faculty Senate therefore recommends the formation of an Internal Governance Committee on Online Education to:

1. Develop policy relevant to undergraduate and graduate distance, online, and digital learning.

2. Provide university-wide communication and follow-through for relevant policy recommendations.
3. Address the multiple and complex issues emerging from the increasing number of online course offerings and degree programs.
4. Dispel tensions and facilitate conversation and cross-fertilization between the two dominant modes of teaching and learning: online and face-to-face.
5. Research and report on current and emerging online education issues as they relate to practice and policy at Radford University – for example, appropriate use of online vs face-to-face instruction, online course size, use of online ‘boxed courses’, issues of course transformation between the two formats (e.g., equivalency), etc.

**Overview of committee responsibilities:** The following is a list of issues and tasks that would fall in the domain of this IG. These tasks include (but are not limited to) the provision of:

- A committee that can develop policy and faculty awareness around issues of online course materials including, but not limited to legal code compliance (e.g., copyright and FERPA), intellectual property ownership and transfer, online course development and quality assurance.
- A community of practice for faculty collaborations involved in sustainable online course development with the potential to accommodate changing demographic needs, which highlights faculty distinctiveness rather than a reliance on third-party content providers.
- A committee that can facilitate a university-wide discussion to develop recommendations for online education and digital learning quality indicators, and best practices.
- The formation of a faculty community that can establish a common language for discussion and identification of online learning/programs (for example: synchronous, asynchronous, blended, flipped, hybrid, remote support, CMI (Computer Mediated Instruction), ICT (Information Communication Technology)).
- A faculty driven committee that can collaborate with the administration on online programming and the university’s general strategy for online offerings.
- A committee that can coordinate online education-related communication and policy follow-through with various offices and departments.
- A committee that can provides input in the area of approaches to quality control
- A committee that can update the language in the T&R Handbook so that the guidelines for absence policies, classroom office hours, and other conditions currently defined in terms of face-to-face teaching will also be relevant to online education.
- A committee that can coordinate and assess faculty satisfaction with the reliability and usability of instructional tools and platforms, such as D2L. Questions of relevance will include investigation into dissatisfaction with D2L, specifically regarding downtime, but also including its ease of use or lack thereof and relevance to various academic styles and disciplines. The committee will be asked to consider whether D2L is the best option for online education.
- A committee that can provide assurance that online courses and programs are fully accessible to those individuals using or benefitting from adaptive technologies.

The need for this policy is evident:

- A recent situation with an RU course, dealing with various legal and ethical issues related to online courses, has already led to the development of an ad hoc policy by the Provost's office.
- The 11/7/2013 recommendations of the RU Online Education Taskforce final report directly points to the need for a committee. At a Faculty Issues meeting with representatives of the CITL (Center for Instructional Technology and Learning), concerns raised by both Faculty Issues members and CITL corroborated the RU Online Education Taskforce recommendation for an ongoing body dedicated to the issue of online education. Both groups were in agreement that this "ongoing body" should cross over and bridge concerns that are currently being addressed in several places without being brought together or including examination of how change in one area impacts practices in another.

Without university-wide conversations that explicitly afford spaces for faculty-faculty and faculty-administration discussions about technologies, technology initiatives, and technology-driven policies we may unintentionally:

- Exacerbate fears, concerns, and misinformation among faculty regarding technology-relevant issues, policies, and initiatives.
- Inhibit faculty innovation and receptivity to the university's technology-relevant goals, policies, and initiatives.
- Impede the university's ability to build the necessary capacity and utilize faculty talent and expertise to proactively respond to these on-going changes.
- Hamper the efforts of Chairs to recruit Faculty to teach online classes and support emerging online/hybrid Graduate programs.