

Ad Hoc Committee on Online Learning Report

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Philosophy

A university education is more than a content delivery system. It comprises a community of learners and teachers focused on continuing pursuit of knowledge and means of acquiring, synthesizing and applying it. Online courses should be a component of our efforts, but cannot replace that. Pedagogy should drive the use of the technology and not vice-versa. A careful and thoughtful strategy for incorporating online learning into the curriculum should be systematically designed, developed and assessed. Implementation should include significant, ongoing training of faculty and investment in service and support for students and faculty. It is essential that the university identify the academic needs to be filled by online courses and what the audience is for those.

Proposed Strategy

Strategy for on-line offerings involves taking into account using online components to extend existing on-ground classes as hybrid courses, and the distinction between undergraduate and graduate needs and abilities.

Priority for online course offerings should be in order as follows:

1. Online programs and courses at the graduate level - both by developing predominantly online programs such as data mining, and by offering online classes to students who are already professionals and have had considerable on-ground or online experience as undergraduates.
2. Hybrid courses at the undergraduate level - priority to hybrid courses which incorporate the equivalent of 1 credit (15 credits of direct instruction plus a minimum of 30 hrs outside work per semester) wholly online additions to existing 3 credit courses. This would fit in nicely with the proposed 4 credit policy to be submitted to Senate by another ad-hoc committee, and provide undergraduates with the best of both worlds - on ground and online.
3. Online courses at the undergraduate level during summer and winter session. This allows students to more conveniently accumulate additional credits to graduate beyond what is offered during fall and spring; attracts non-CCSU students; and brings additional revenue to the university (as well as compensation to faculty).
4. Wholly online courses at the undergraduate level - as per the suggested 20 section pilot (see below), with due consideration to satisfying the following conditions for any further expansion: (i) development of a procedure to authenticate students, especially for exams; (ii) assessment of courses for content and delivery; (iii) assurance of faculty control and ownership of intellectual content; and (iv) a guarantee of no out-sourcing of online classes to MOOCs such as Coursera.

Proposed Trial

Development of this strategy is hampered by the dearth of meaningful assessment at CCSU which would allow comparison of online to on-ground courses. With this in mind we propose several changes to the university's online course policy including the following:

- Recommend lifting the cap on online-only courses from 10 to 20 in the fall and spring to allow a one-year trial with a maximum of 20 sections per semester online only courses (excluding online grad programs and non-credit courses.) Assessment of online delivery (in addition to the dept. instrument) for the courses is required and class sizes no larger than the comparable on-ground course.
- Courses offered online could also have an on-ground component, such as exams or presentations, during the academic year to accommodate student and faculty need.
- Preference would be given to courses offered online which have an on-ground counterpart during the academic year for comparison.
- For the purposes of this trial, a report on the learning outcomes (etc) will be required for online-courses. Suggested collection of data can be done with either the departmental instrument or other similar tool. Additional questions reflecting on the online experience in particular will be a part of the mandatory assessment.
- Courses would still have to be approved by the dept. chair and the dean would have to winnow down the candidates to get to each school's quota.
- Online courses that are part of this trial in the spring and the fall will be restricted to matriculated students. We strongly encourage at least one in-person assessment as appropriate for the course material. A method for verifying student identity should be incorporated in the course.
- Trial would last one full calendar year and results of assessment would be evaluated to determine future directions.

Online Course Assessment

All online courses are subject to contractual and department guidelines regarding evaluation of courses. The survey tool survey.ccsu.edu or other suitable method can be used to administer the department instrument. The larger number of courses offered online in the summer form an ideal, but untapped pool for assessment and should be assessed during the trial period.

A meaningful assessment should not only include measurement of content knowledge but should also include assessment of other benefits of a university course (e.g. unplanned discussions, in-person interaction, etc.). The university Assessment Committee should be heavily involved in the development of this assessment.

Additional Recommendations

No faculty should ever be forced to offer a course online and all course materials developed by a faculty member are the sole property of that faculty member. Faculty new to online-only courses should have required University training with an Instructional Design component that is designed to provide faculty members with the technical skills to offer the classes and an exposure to good online pedagogy. We recommend the Committee on Teaching and Learning help coordinate faculty development with staff from the IDTRC.

An interactive online student training program aimed at students who have not previously taken online courses will be made available. This should help students to become familiar with the skills needed to be successful in an online course.

We strongly encourage full-time faculty to develop and offer online courses and to participate in this trial. No financial incentives should be given for this development apart from any applicable curriculum development grants or the usual monies for developing an online course for the first time.

Hybrid Courses

A course is hybrid if a portion of the credit hours normally allotted as on-ground class meeting time is strictly online with the expectation that the online component will count for the remaining credit load. This could be a 3 credit class that meets 1 day/week for 1:15 with the other half online. This could be a course that meets 3 days/week for :50 but carries 4 credits. Courses that are listed as hybrid can not require more than 50% of the course be online.

In all cases, hybrid courses should be listed in the course offerings with the division of online/onground time **made explicit**. For example a 3 credit 50/50 course would announce the on-ground meeting time (1 day/week for 1:15 in NC 22410) and the online meeting time (1:15/week ONLINE). In no case should faculty simply announce at the beginning of classes that the course listed as MW 9:25-10:40 in LD 210 is actually a hybrid that meets once a week.

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