

Online Course Policies Position Paper

Online education is an increasingly important part of higher education. Many members of the MSP currently offer courses that are all or partially online. The MSP is committed to being involved in the development of high quality online courses and methods, and we want to

...ensure that faculty are centrally involved in developing and teaching courses with online content.

...protect intellectual property rights of faculty

...participate in the development of online course policy so that these courses do not undermine the hiring of full-time and tenure-track faculty.

While there are ongoing debates about the value of particular pedagogical techniques, we are primarily concerned with protecting MSP members' rights and maintaining the high quality of our courses. The MSP previously negotiated language in our contract that guaranteed our members' intellectual property rights over online courses and involved the union in negotiations over terms for the development of new courses.

Unfortunately, the administration is now seeking to change or eliminate this language because they hope to dramatically increase the number of online courses and dramatically lower their cost. They have proposed that all courses for which they pay a development fee will become the property of the university forever. If the university were to retain complete ownership of on-line courses, they could then hire graduate students, adjuncts, or other cheap instructors to teach them.

They are particularly focusing on GenEd courses, which means that our residential students who cannot find space in a classroom-based GenEd course (because there are not enough faculty), could pay extra to take it online through Continuing Education. We fear that this approach -- which prioritizes the generation of revenue over high quality teaching -- would violate the important principle of equal access to courses and would simultaneously undermine the hiring of tenure-track faculty, one of our most important goals.

The MSP faced this issue at the beginning of January, when the administration brought us an agreement they intended to use with faculty participating in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences' Online Fellows Program. The agreement would have given the administration perpetual license -- in effect, ownership -- to use the course developed by the faculty member. The MSP rejected this agreement and instead negotiated one that gave the university only a three-year license. The protections contained in our contract were crucial for derailing the administration's misguided plans.

For the new contract, we proposed that the existing protection remain, and that we increase the fee paid to our members for course development -- from \$5000 to \$6000, the standard Five College rate -- and that an additional fee be paid for a faculty member to rework the course after it had been offered for the first time. Our goal is to both make sure that online courses - which may be offered multiple times by different instructors -- be of as high quality as possible, and that the administration be discouraged from seeing them primarily as a low-cost way to deliver the curriculum.