

**2005-2006**  
**ANNUAL REPORT**  
**of the**  
**AD HOC COMMITTEE ON**  
**ONLINE LEARNING**

**Presented at the**  
**659<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting of the Faculty Senate**  
**February 15, 2007**

**COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

**William Richards Adrion**  
**Donna Baron**  
**Carol Bigelow**  
**Marilyn Billings, Co-Chair**  
**Marilyn Blaustein**  
**Wayne Burleson**  
**D. Anthony Butterfield**  
**Ann Cary**  
**John Cunningham**  
**J. Michael Davis**  
**Victoria Dowling**  
**John Dubach**  
**Sharon Fross**  
**Copper Giloth**  
**David Hart**

**John Hird**  
**M. Christine King**  
**Laetitia La Follette**  
**Donna LeCourt**  
**Matthew Mattingly**  
**Ernest May**  
**John McCarthy**  
**Lori Mestre**  
**Sara McComb, Co-Chair**  
**Richard Rogers**  
**Mei-Yau Shih**  
**Martha Stassen**  
**Pam Trafford**  
**Richard Yuretich**  
**Fred Zinn**

**2005-2006 Annual Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Online Learning  
January 8, 2007**

The Faculty Senate established an Ad Hoc Committee on Online Learning in September, 2004 with the charge to:

- **Oversee academic standards and issues of quality assurance with respect to all UMA undergraduate and graduate courses taught online or in hybrid format.**
- **Research issues of comparative outcomes assessment with respect to traditional, hybrid, and online courses and programs.**
- **Recommend policy changes, as appropriate, to the Graduate Council and the Academic Matters Council.**
- **Advise the campus administration with respect to the optimal technological infrastructure appropriate to effective online and technologically assisted instruction, including the University Library.**
- **Advise the campus administration with respect to the provision of “how-to” materials and instructional design assistance for new online instructors.**
- **Advise the campus administration, the Graduate Council, the Academic Matters Council, the General Education Council, and the Undergraduate Education Council with respect to issues of online learning.**

The Committee of the Whole met six times during the 2005-2006 academic year:

- **September 20, 2004: The Committee received the charge from Ernest May, Secretary of the Faculty Senate. Marilyn Billings and Sara McComb were elected Co-Chairs and Tamatha Gaumnitz was elected Secretary of the Committee at this meeting. The Committee also established four subcommittees based on their charge: Academic Standards and Security, Comparative Outcomes, Infrastructure and Library, and Instructional Design.**
- **October 18, 2004: Sharon Fross, Vice Provost Outreach and Director of Continuing Education, spoke to the Committee about her experiences with Penn State University’s World Campus.**
- **November 16, 2004: David Gray, UMassOnline CEO, and his staff met with the Committee to present an overview of the UMassOnline organization, their strategic plan, and the ways in which they can work with the Committee in a manner that will be mutually beneficial.**
- **February 8, 2005: The Committee held a brainstorming session to establish expectations for the Committee as a whole and the subcommittees.**
- **March 8, 2005: Andy Churchill, Assistant Director of the Center for Education Policy, presented the summary findings of his report on *Ensuring Quality in Online Higher Education*.**
- **April 12, 2005: Steven Tello, Associate Director of Distance Learning, University of Massachusetts Lowell, presented an overview of the way in which his organization supports distance learning.**

*ATTACHMENT I: ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND SECURITY ANNUAL REPORT*

*Subcommittee Members*

**Tony Butterfield (Management), Ann Cary-Chair (Nursing/Public Health and Health Sciences), John Hird (Public Policy), Donna LeCourt (English), John McCarthy (Linguistics), and Peg Wherry (Continuing Education)**

*Subcommittee Charge*

**Oversee academic standards and issues of quality assurance and security with respect to all UMA undergraduate and graduate courses and programs taught online or in hybrid form.**

**Inactive; No Report**

*ATTACHMENT II: COMPARATIVE OUTCOMES ANNUAL REPORT*

*Subcommittee Members*

**Rick Adrion (Professor, Computer Science), Marilyn Blaustein (Director, Institutional Research), Richard Rogers (Faculty Advisor for Undergraduate Education, Provost's Office), Mei-Yau Shih (Coordinator of Teaching Technologies, Center for Teaching), and Martha Stassen, Chair (Director of Assessment, Academic Planning and Assessment)**

*Subcommittee Charge*

**Research issues of comparative outcomes assessment with respect to traditional, hybrid, and online courses and programs.**

*Needs Assessment and Environmental Scan Results*

Proposed Role/Activities:

- 1. What is the context for online learning – who's teaching, who's taking the courses, what are enrollments like, what departments are most active, etc.?**
- 2. What are the challenges to assessment of courses?**
  - a. What are the right categories of courses – define hybrid, enhances. (What about vide o courses?)**
  - b. How are courses identified on the UMA System, are there better ways to systematically identify these courses?**
- 3. What does the literature recommend, what are the issues nationally? (e.g., appropriate benchmarks, optimal class size, etc.)**
- 4. What is currently being done at UMA – both in terms of research and in terms of tools that could be used to assess online courses?**

*Subcommittee Accomplishments to Date*

**In 2004 -2005, the Subcommittee focused on items 1) and 2) above. The Subcommittee developed a set of definitions of online courses and identified recommendations for changes related to understanding the context for online instruction. These activities were merged with the work of the Instructional Design Subcommittee and continued to develop through their work. See Attachment IV of this report.**

In 2005-2006, the Subcommittee focused on items 3) and 4) above. Our Subcommittee used current research on assessing Online Courses and our review of current course and program-based assessment practices at the University to identify a number of strategies to improve the assessment of online courses and develop comparative measures of success. Our preliminary recommendations call for improvements and adaptations to current institutional practices as the first step in improving the assessment of online course and program assessment. (These recommendations are attached.)

Recommendations that were generally accepted by the Ad Hoc Committee as a whole and action has been taken on the following recommendations:

1. **Systematize use of SRTI in online course evaluation:** Currently, the members of the subcommittee and the staff of the Office of Academic Planning and Assessment (which coordinates the SRTI system) are collaborating with Continuing and Professional Education on the following two recommendations:
  - Ensuring use of a common set of course evaluation items (from the Student Response to Instruction, or SRTI) in both face-to-face and online courses to facilitate comparative outcomes assessment.
  - Supporting the efforts of UMass Online and Continuing and Professional Education to improve the response rates for the Online SRTI administration.
2. **Conducting comparative analyses of outcomes** (i.e., performance on assignments/tests, course grades, course retention) for courses that are taught by the same instructor in both a face-to-face and online environment.
  - Members of the Ad Hoc Committee have volunteered themselves, or their colleagues, to provide the course-based student performance data for this effort. The Office of Academic Planning and Assessment will coordinate this effort and conduct the analyses.
3. Other Subcommittee recommendations require additional discussion or investigation before further action can be taken. Specifically, the recommendation that the Faculty Senate **Develop a method for reviewing courses when a new delivery method (i.e., online instruction) is proposed** has raised a number of questions about whether or not online courses should be singled out as a special case for review. This recommendation was tabled until next year.

#### *Subcommittee Goals for Next Year*

The Subcommittee will continue to work through the recommendations made this year, with a particular focus on collecting and analyzing data from the descriptive and comparative analyses we have proposed.

The Subcommittee will also work with the full Ad Hoc Committee to identify the terms and limits of considering online instruction as a special case, requiring (or suggesting) specific assessment strategies and review policies.

#### *Recommendations to Faculty Senate*

- Support systematic administration and use of SRTI for comparative outcomes assessment.
- Support efforts to improve response rates for online course evaluations.

*ATTACHMENT III: INFRASTRUCTURE AND LIBRARY ANNUAL REPORT*

*Subcommittee Members*

**Donna Baron (Five Colleges), Mike Davis (Library), Copper Giloth (OIT and Art), Dave Hart (CESD), Pam Trafford (Management), and Peg Wherry (Continuing Education)**

*Subcommittee Charge*

**Advise the campus administration with respect to the optimal technological infrastructure appropriate to effective online and technologically-assisted instruction, including the University Library.**

**Inactive; No Report**

*ATTACHMENT IV: INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN ANNUAL REPORT*

*Subcommittee Members*

**Wayne Burleson (ECE), Victoria Dowling (UWW), Matt Mattingly (CESD), Richard Yuretich (Geosciences), Fred Zinn (OIT)**

*Subcommittee Charge*

**Advise the campus administration with respect to the provision of “how-to” materials and instructional design assistance for new online instructors.**

*Topics under consideration*

- **Developing mechanisms for sharing best practices**
- **Planning for improvements in communication about available resources**
- **Identifying resources needed to do instructional design**
- **Understanding faculty training and support needs**
- **Recommending faculty training and support programs**

*Subcommittee Accomplishments in 2005-2006*

- **Completed discussions with faculty focus groups.**  
**In Fall 2005, the Subcommittee met with several faculty to discuss barriers to the adoption of online tools (a “skeptics” group). The results of this discussion (and the previous year’s discussion with “early-adopters”) have given us a clearer view of the issues faced by faculty as they incorporate online tools into their teaching.**
- **Proposed a formal revision of the SPIRE “Instruction Mode” classifications that are used to describe courses that incorporate online activities. This five-point scale provides a much clearer way to describe the degrees of “online teaching” that are being used on this campus. The final approval of this revision will be considered by the full Faculty Senate in Fall 2006 for implementation with the PeopleSoft upgrade during fall semester.**

*Sub-Committee Goals for Next Year 2006-2007*

- **Complete the approval of the revised “Modes of Instruction”**
- **Propose several specific forms that the faculty support could take. Initial ideas include online resources, paper handbooks, and a user group or other face-to-face gathering.**
- **Develop a recommended “table of contents” covering the topics that should be covered in support materials for faculty considering online teaching (in all its forms). This table of contents will be used by the group(s) that are designated to provide support to help guide the development of specific materials.**

*Recommendations to Faculty Senate*

**Once the new “modes of instruction” have been approved, we hope that these categories will be useful to expand the discussion of “online learning” to include the full spectrum of possibilities, rather than just the dichotomy of face-to-face classes vs. fully online classes. Not every topic or teaching technique is appropriate in 100% online, but it is also the case that 100% face-to-face may also be too limited for some topics and some students. We hope that these new categories will help spur departments to have serious discussions about appropriate use of online tools in the context of their own disciplines.**

*Preliminary Proposal*

**By the end of our Subcommittee’s run, we plan to give the Faculty Senate a concrete proposal for the presentation and maintenance of faculty support materials regarding online teaching. These will include several proposed forms (online, paper, and face-to-face) and a suggested list of topics. These topics will include technical issues, pedagogical recommendations, and course administration tips (i.e., how to do the mundane stuff more efficiently using online tools). More important than the initial form that these will materials take, we want to ensure that the maintenance of the materials is considered along with (if not before) their development. Without a maintenance plan, these materials will quickly become obsolete. Because of the variety of topics, we expect that a inter-office collaboration between faculty support areas will be necessary.**