

*Report from Candyce Reynolds, Ph.D. Associate Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy and chair-elect in the Graduate School of Education. PSU faculty representative on the Inter-institutional Faculty Senate*

- I want to acknowledge that online education is just like face to face education. They are both delivery models of education
  - Good and bad, effective and not effective
- I want to acknowledge that we live in challenging times for Higher Education
  - We are working with increasingly diverse populations that are differentially prepared.
  - The cost of Higher Education continues to grow and online education, at least at PSU, means higher costs for students.
  - The development of complex thinking and skills and other capacities is what Higher Education can offer is even more important than ever.
    - A recent report dated 4-10-13 from Association of American Colleges and Universities entitled: *IT TAKES MORE THAN A MAJOR: Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success* ([http://www.aacu.org/leap/documents/2013\\_EmployerSurvey.pdf](http://www.aacu.org/leap/documents/2013_EmployerSurvey.pdf)) concluded that these characteristics were essential for college graduates to be successful in the workplace: critical thinking, written and oral communication skills, the ability to solve complex problems, demonstrated ethical judgment and integrity, intercultural skills, and applied knowledge in real-world settings.
  - The challenge is to provide high quality, affordable HE whether it is online or face-to-face
  - At PSU:
    - All online courses are integrated in our academic departments and taught by regular faculty: tenure-track, fixed-term, and adjunct.
    - There is a good mix of online, hybrid (or blended)—reduced seat time, and face-to-face courses offered at the university
    - Courses have gone through the regular curricular process and are evaluated in the same manner as any face-to-face course. There is no special review of hybrid or online courses for quality.
    - Students pay a hybrid and an online fee: Hybrid: \$30/credit hour, Online: \$60/credit hour. Web-enhanced courses (those using the Learning Management System but offered face-to-face). These courses do not carry an additional fee for students. Most courses at PSU are web-enhanced.
    - It is unclear to faculty where these fees have gone and how they have and will be used. The support offered to develop and support faculty has been minimal. Student support has also been minimal.
    - The Provost has recently used \$3,000,000 collected from these fees to fund a project called reThink PSU, which to date funded a number of proposals made by faculty to increase online offerings and use technology to increase access and enhance learning. It is unclear, however, how this fee will be used in the future.

Some publications characterize this program as a one-time opportunity, others have indicated that it is the first of opportunities for funding

- Faculty see the benefit to students of offering hybrid and online learning. It offers:
  - Convenience
  - Flexibility
  - For some students, increased individual focus can positively impact learning
- Faculty also have concerns about online learning at PSU:
  - An increase in the number of online and hybrid courses has meant in some departments that there is a decrease in face-to-face offering, resulting in students needing to take online courses and pay the additional fees even when they would prefer and learn better from face-to-face courses. Many scholarships, etc. cover tuition but not fees.
  - Recent research points to concerns that online and hybrid learning environments can be a hazard for first-generation, under-represented minorities and low-income students. These students experience higher drop-out rates or do more poorly in these classes than in face-to-face classes, impacting their motivation and ability to persist in higher education. Some have called online learning, a new civil rights issue for this reason.
  - MOOCs are a concern as research also indicates that successful online courses require “teacher presence” and a sense of caring from the instructor, again, especially for our most vulnerable populations. The success of MOOCs necessitates a level of self-direction and perseverance that is not normally associated with undergraduate students in general. They also assume that higher education can be unbundled—individual courses and not coordinated, focused academic programs are the focus when we look at delivering curriculum through MOOCs. While MOOCs may have a place in the array of opportunities for students as they pursue higher education, it should not be seen as the panacea for low cost, effective education.
- Online and hybrid courses can be part of the array of good instruction offered to students in Higher Education. In order for it to be effective and contribute rather than distract from our goal of 40-40-20, we need to insure that it is offered at a reasonable cost and that faculty and students are both adequately supported in its practice.